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# **Staging Imagination: Transformations of Shakespeare in Wordsworth and Coleridge**

**Patricia Marie O'Boyle**

**Ph.D. Thesis**

**Department of English Studies**

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**2008**



25 MAR 2009

# Acknowledgements

This doctoral research could not have been completed without the kindness, guidance, and always timely help of Professor Michael O'Neill, to whom I give my warmest thanks and appreciation.

I would also like to thank Durham University Graduate School for their support.

The thesis is gratefully dedicated to my family, especially my husband Jim, my three daughters Jenny, Claire and Katherine, and my sister, Clare.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways that Wordsworth and Coleridge transform the works of Shakespeare, in order to stage the imagination as it functions in the lives of the characters in their poetry. I look especially at the importance of the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to their poetic project, and show how elements of the play resurface in various poems, prefaces and prose writings of the two poets over a span of nearly twenty years. I argue that Wordsworth's transformations of Shakespeare contribute to a democratising of poetry, and a valorising of 'our common human heart'. Chapter one discusses *Lyrical Ballads* as a series of poems, which have Theseus' speech on Imagination as their unifying theme, emulating Shakespeare's staging of passion. Chapters two and three examine Alexander Tytler's Essay on Translation as a 'negative' stimulus for Wordsworth's challenging poetic theories, and a source for some of his earliest 'transformations' of Shakespeare. Chapter four is a detailed survey of the critical background, and the Romantic reception of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and examines key themes in the play to elucidate the poets' poetry and prose. Chapter five is a comparison between 'The Last of The Flock' and *The Merchant of Venice*, showing how Wordsworth 'imitates' the tale, and transposes the 'tone' of the comic play into a quieter and sadder 'music'. Chapter six analyses 'Michael', as a transformation of Gaunt in *Richard II* into the 'history homely and rude' of Michael the shepherd. Chapter seven is on Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, which re-tells the tale of the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads*, and Wordsworth's transformative poetics, as a 'translation' of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Chapter eight returns to Alfoxden, and Hazlitt's 'First Acquaintance with Poets', to revisit the poets as the protagonists of 'the dream' that was, and became, *Lyrical Ballads*. **P. M. O'Boyle.**

**Contents**

**Introduction.....1**

**Chapter 1. Meetings and Divergences: Shakespeare as Presider.....26**

**Chapter 2. Translation as Practical Activity.....57**

**Chapter 3. ‘Imitating’ Shakespeare: Imagination’s Work of Translation.....82**

**Chapter 4. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: The Poet’s Eye, the Fairy Queen,  
and Bottom. The Wordsworths and Coleridge in Alfoxden Wood...110**

**Chapter 5. Imitation and Transposition. The Transformative Poetics of  
*Lyrical Ballads*.....158**

**Chapter 6. Similitude in Dissimilitude: *Michael*, History, and Shakespeare.....192**

**Chapter 7. Comic Transformations in *Biographia Literaria*.....223**

**Chapter 8 ‘I desire you of more Acquaintance Good Master Mustard Seed’:  
William Hazlitt’s First Acquaintance with Poets.....276**

**Bibliography.....303**

## Introduction

This thesis examines the relationship between the works of Shakespeare and the poetry and prose of Wordsworth and Coleridge. I argue that in many of his poems Wordsworth employs a transformative method by re-creating Shakespearean themes and characters which often brilliantly disguises his original source material, and that this is done for purposes that are essentially, politically as well as aesthetically, radical in their intent. I examine particularly *Lyrical Ballads* 1798, *The Prelude*, *Michael*, and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. The former poems I read closely as examples of Wordsworth's transformative method, and the latter as Coleridge's attempted exposition of their 'translations' of Shakespeare. I read this as Coleridge's implied criticism of both Wordsworth's failure to acknowledge their debt to Shakespeare, and his readers' and critics' inability to recognise it.

I read Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* as taking translation as his leading idea, staging its various functions and forms in each chapter, almost on every page, (the very title stages it: *Biographia Literaria or Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*), and as using this to 'stage' both Wordsworth's translational method, and Coleridge's own theory of the distinction between imagination and fancy. The relationship of translation to both his theory of the imagination and what Kathleen Wheeler has called Coleridge's metaphorical method,<sup>1</sup> in *Biographia* stems from Coleridge's use of the translation of the Greek word metaphor into the renaissance Latin rhetorical figure of 'translation', and is, therefore, only one form of the process of translation amongst many which Coleridge uses in the book. It is the imagination which translates and the fancy which transforms.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen M. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).



I argue, moreover, that in order to appreciate many of the nuances of Wordsworth's poetry of the imagination and his debt to Shakespeare we should look to Shakespeare's own staging of imagination and fancy, as well as 'the character of the poet', in this case Bottom, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I trace the influence of this play on and in Wordsworth's poetry and Coleridge's theory.

Wordsworth's later regret that 'the hiding places of my power' seem 'closed' and that 'when age comes on [he] may scarcely see at all'<sup>2</sup> is a lament for the loss of a former relationship with something or someone which he envisages as essentially alien, as Kenneth Johnston also senses when he writes of the passages Wordsworth wrote in Goslar for *The Prelude* and *Nutting*:

In each of them, it is not the part of the poem describing Nature that makes them uniquely Wordsworthian, but the parts he cannot describe, because it is not simply 'nature.' Each time he starts off 'going with nature,' but then that movement breaks, and something far greater than natural forms invades his consciousness... Behind these ordinary Lake District scenes there was a landscape of imagination as threateningly alien as if it were another planet.<sup>3</sup>

This visiting muse, one accidentally met, rather than a constant source of inspiration which may indeed be denied to him in future years, comes in the form of enlightenment or revelation. Imagination is often a trespasser, a usurper upon the senses who ambushes the poet 'unawares', and brings to Wordsworth the recognition that '...in such visitings/ of awful promise, when the light of sense/ Goes out in flashes that have shown to us/ The invisible world, doth greatness make abode, there

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<sup>2</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XII 335-38.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth R Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1998). 460.

harbours whether we be young or old.’<sup>4</sup> This process, involving, as he writes in the lines just prior to the above, in what for many critics is considered an intrusion, an abrupt halt in the progress of his song, is a translation of a translation. Describing the point when, on losing their guides in the mountains, Wordsworth and his companion ask for directions from a Swiss peasant:

Hard of belief we questioned him again,  
And all the answers which the man returned  
To our enquiries, in their sense and substance  
Translated by the feelings which we had,  
Ended in this—that we had crossed the Alps.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of typically providential, accidental meeting so sensitively illuminated by Frederick Garber in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter*,<sup>6</sup> is celebrated by Wordsworth in *The Leech Gatherer*, and in those almost supernatural encounters with all the lonely wanderers of the earth he meets in his poetry of human suffering. Bottom’s meeting with Titania in the woods could be read as Shakespeare’s staging of the poet’s reluctant meeting with the muse of fancy, who politely refuses to be seduced by her. In this account, the character of Oberon whose powers are supposedly higher than those of Titania—having claimed the changeling boy from her to ‘trace the forests wild’ (*MND* I i 25)—represents the imagination. Theseus, as a philosopher of sorts, will rise above those ‘level streams’ of the valley bottom, as Coleridge describes the aspirations of poets and philosophers driven to seek higher truths than those understood by ordinary mortals. Their source, though, is ‘far higher

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<sup>4</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XI 533-37. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York; London: Norton, 1979), 216. All subsequent citations of the 1805 version are from this edition.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* VI 520-24.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Garber, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter* (Urbana University of Illinois Press, 1971).

and far inward' in the heart.<sup>7</sup> I try to show how both Wordsworth and Coleridge took on the roles of characters from the play, often in an almost comic re-enacting of the psychomachic contest for the soul of the changeling boy, which Shakespeare stages as a dream, and which Coleridge reformulates in *Kubla Khan* as a longing for 'a damsel playing on a dulcimer.'

What Wordsworth fears is loss of vision, a loss of the power to see something more in nature than nature, which others might not have seen had he not pointed it out or re-disclosed it. Coleridge longs for the music of the vision, which in *Biographia Literaria* he points to as an essential gift of poetic genius. This might be a not an unfitting description of the differing key qualities of the poets.<sup>8</sup> When M.H. Abrams declares the romantic mind to be figured in the image of the lamp rather than the mirror, it is its illuminating power which he refers to, rather than the more familiar mirror, the common epithet applied to Shakespeare's particular genius.<sup>9</sup> Given that both Coleridge and Wordsworth had met while both were intent on writing and having plays produced in the manner of Shakespeare, the analogy of the mirror is apposite at this stage certainly of Wordsworth's career. The failure to have their plays produced may have steered the poets towards the creation of a lyric poetry, which is often dramatic in its form, the ballad. Not in the sense of engaging in dialogue, though many of the poems do, but in presenting dramatic situations without making the action or situation the focus of interest, but the feeling engendered by or the state of

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol. 7. Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, Bollingen Series 75, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (London; Princeton: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1983). I, 238-39. Coleridge means in the 'heart' or love.

<sup>8</sup> 'But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learnt.' Ibid. II, 20.

<sup>9</sup> See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

mind staged within the poem. A common element linking many of the poems, including those of Coleridge, is that they stage the many functions of imagination in ordinary experience as defined by Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800.

Julie Carlson has documented the importance of theatricality to a proper assessment of Coleridge's theories of mind, in order to re-evaluate what has been for many, since critical recognition of its roots in revolution, Romanticism's supposed turn away from theatre, history, and action to a closeted and immured preoccupation with imagination and mind. Carlson demonstrates how Coleridge stages mind 'as theatre,' and in discussing his plays from *Osorio* to *Remorse* and *Zapolya*, tracks the development of a process of theorizing revolution to which she sees later canonical poets who turn to theatre responding. In her analysis of Coleridge's ideas on 'commanding genius', she focuses on the relationship between dreams and power:

Not every poet demystifies commanding genius by featuring heroes as inactive as Coleridge's but they all approach the subject of revolution through lengthy discourse on dreams. Virtually every dramatic protagonist takes time out to puzzle out the relationship between vision and reality in these plays...

Not only does he [Coleridge] name the problem for England in a play about revolution—his translation in 1800 of Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy—but his aesthetic writings portray theatre as a commanding for(u)m of dreams. On the one hand theatre comes closer to 'reality' in its 'imitation of reality' than does any other poetic form. On the other hand, the 'reality' that theatre exemplifies is the stuff, and psychic process, of dreams. Even more particular to Coleridge is the way that he

lives the dilemma of commanding genius as personal tragedy.<sup>10</sup>

Carlson's emphasis on the centrality of theatre and dream to Coleridge's aesthetics, and her recognition that his personal response to revolution and his former 'Jacobin' part in its potentiality is one of remorse, is buttressed by her judicious use of supporting biographical detail in order to fully articulate what is essentially a record of intertextuality or, more importantly, imaginative and emotional response, both Coleridge's, the later Romantics' and her own and others', to the plays she watched and was 'moved' by. The revelation she encountered in the plays that she watched 'revived' for representation, was the importance of the body:

Seeing *The Borderers* suddenly brought body into consciousness, not simply because theatrical representation employs body as 'evidence' of mind. This play, with its reservations about "French" minds, gave body a kind of national precedence over and autonomy from mind. Morality was apprehensible as a physical property...<sup>11</sup>

I give some attention in this thesis to the role that 'body' plays in Wordsworth and Coleridge's aesthetics, as well as their changing religious beliefs, in that the incarnation of Christ informs their poetry, and gives it theological 'grounding'.

Wordsworth in *The Prelude* of 1805 chose to tell the story of the growth of his own mind in the form of an epic biography, and as the drama of his own imagination's impairment and restoration, the experiences of revolution, and books. In the two- book *Prelude* of 1798-1799, his first attempt at this poem, I read the elements of Shakespeare's mythical or fanciful figures recreated by Wordsworth as the

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<sup>10</sup> Julie A. Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 19.



characters of danger and desire, and staged against the backdrop of the acquisition or inheritance of powers at once seductive and, potentially, destructive. If we trace the development of Wordsworth's loss of imagination it follows from his immersion in the books he was forced to study at the University, and his failure to distinguish between dreams which are fancifully unrealistic and 'dreams' or hopes which have the potential to be realised, and often are realised in the 'very world which is the world of all of us'.<sup>12</sup>

The distinctions between imagination and fancy, which both Coleridge and Wordsworth attempt to define, and also stage, are already distinguished and staged by Shakespeare in his most philosophical and yet ludicrous of comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Wordsworth uses elements of the play in many of his poems but most often he stages imagination itself in its many functions. Imagination in one of its functions involves the ability to see in the common and ordinary something which is ultimately divine in nature, majestic and dignified. To see 'Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt'<sup>13</sup> is akin to Wordsworth seeing something noble and majestic in the face of the 'gypsy'<sup>14</sup> whom he meets, and in the shepherds he 'glorifies.'

In all my walks, through field or town,  
Such Figure had I never seen:  
Her face was of Egyptian brown:  
Fit person was she for a Queen,  
To head those ancient Amazonian files:  
Or ruling Bandit's Wife among the Grecian Isles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, X 727.

<sup>13</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979). V i 11.

<sup>14</sup> Wordsworth's gypsies, wanderers, and shepherds become the touchstone for his sense of the inherent dignity of man. See *The Prelude* 1805, XII 142-219.

<sup>15</sup> 'Beggars' 7-12.

The reference to Hypolita, also links her with Helen of Troy, and Theseus' 'brow of Egypt.' Wordsworth's claim to have revolutionised poetry by making the common man his hero, the sufferings of the poor and the ordinary his theme, and a demonstration of our common humanity his abiding and 'worthy purpose', is also the story of how he often transformed the nobler heroes and heroines of Shakespeare's plays into the ordinary, yet never insignificant, men and women he writes about in his poetry. This democratisation of poetry by Wordsworth is something which William Hazlitt was later to write of as partaking of the revolutionary 'Spirit of the Age', and to describe in terms of Wordsworth's 'levelling muse.'

My research method in this thesis is a blend of close reading, intertextual study, biographical reflection, and historical contextualisation that takes account of the political and social worlds in which the works were written. I touch on the influence on the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads* of their acquaintance and fellow poet the radical orator John Thelwall's experiences as a victim of the politically repressive period of 1795 and its aftermath, and, more importantly, on the poetry's reception history and the careers of the two poets, especially with regard to Frances Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth, and Coleridge's response to that in *Biographia*.

I use the letters, notebooks, poetry and prose, as well as Hazlitt's later recollections to examine the traces and development of Wordsworth and Coleridge's debt to Shakespeare, and lessons learned from Shakespeare's plays in terms of characterisation, and their stress on the human emotions, expressed in the structure and style of the language, and in the foregrounding of domestic relationships. I argue throughout this thesis however, that their most important influence was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The structure of my thesis is mainly chronological, following the publication dates of the poems and *Biographia Literaria*. I break this sequence

occasionally, especially in chapter four when I concentrate on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. My opening chapter is on the meeting of the two poets, the influence of Shakespeare on their individual work at that time, and how the play impacted on their choice of a unifying theme, that of imagination, for *Lyrical Ballads*.

I suggested in my article 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Thelwall's *Fairy of the Lake*' that John Thelwall's play stages the emergence of a new kind of poetry and the overthrow of gaudy poetic diction, portraying the genius behind the battle to renew both liberty and poetry as Coleridge, particularly in the characters of Incubus and Tristram, and that the somewhat anti-heroic Arthur is meant to be Wordsworth. Thelwall's play resonates with allusions to both poets' work of 1796-1800, including Wordsworth's *The Borderers* and *Lyrical Ballads*, *Religious Musings* and *Frost at Midnight*. The play celebrates the role of the Fairy of the Lake, (who remains mysteriously in the background for most of the play, and whom I tentatively take to be Dorothy Wordsworth) in establishing a new era in literature, and in the wider democratisation of the politics of poetry. But she is also a figure who represents the muse of poetry, and her designation as a fairy links her with the Welsh nation, and Celtic folk-lore. Characters such as Lady Macbeth, Falstaff, and Bottom, all make their appearance in this melodramatic, musical miscellany.<sup>16</sup> But Tristram makes his appearance again in the underlying form of one of Coleridge's models for *Biographia Literaria* in the book's affinities with *Tristram Shandy*. I refer to this in chapter seven.

Wordsworth's legacy has been to be extolled as the poet of both Nature and the Imagination, and it is, as Jonathan Bate writes in *Shakespeare and the English*

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<sup>16</sup> Patty O'Boyle, "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Thelwall's *Fairy of the Lake*," *The Coleridge Bulletin New Series* 28 (NS). Winter 2006 (2006), 63-71. I refer to the play in chapter seven on *Biographia Literaria*. I now see – and it should have been obvious at the time – that the cryptic song referring to C-W-R-W, the Welsh word for beer, could also refer to C- (Coleridge) and W - R - W (Wordsworth), not simply their benefactors, the Wedgwoods, Roscoe and Crompton, though it could have been read by others as doing so. See p. 69.

*Romantic Imagination*, in those terms that critics of Shakespeare generally couched their praise of the playwright for the two hundred years prior to the emergence of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the German critics, principally Schlegel.<sup>17</sup> My approach to this topic is not unlike Bate's in that I make a detailed comparison between the Shakespeare plays and poems transformed by the poets, but I generally find parallelisms at the level of plot or narrative, and character and theme, rather than in their use of Shakespearean allusions. In this sense my approach is more akin to the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye,<sup>18</sup> but it is also a departure from it in that Wordsworth's stress on the particularity of the individuals portrayed in his poetry, despite their generic character features, means that in character portrayal he is less heavily enslaved, to use a common translational metaphor he employs himself, to his mythological or archetypal sources. He uses the metaphor in his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, however, to good if paradoxical effect, when he describes the child as unaware of his gradual 'translation' from master to slave in the form of 'endless imitation' (*Ode*, 108)) or social role playing in his mortal state.

Wordsworth's characters, though very much rooted in their own political and social context are not conduits for the manners of an age. What Wordsworth and Coleridge equally stress is our common 'human' nature, which, for good or ill, means that the emotions, the detailed observation of the poet, as well as the translating imagination plays a greater role in their poetry. The human heart in Wordsworth, the good heart in Coleridge, and in Shakespeare's plays, signifies something not more important than the imagination, the agent or medium through which truths otherwise

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). See especially chapter one: 'Shakespeare, Imagination, Romanticism.'

<sup>18</sup> See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). For essays on the religious vision which supports Frye's theory of influence and continuity see Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983).

difficult to comprehend may be perceived, but the heart is the foundation upon which any aspiration to a more philosophical, Platonic, or 'imaginative' love is to be based.

Where I do find common ground with Northrop Frye and some of his followers is in the use of the terms 'source material' and 'target material', for it is here that the language of translation theory and archetypal criticism meet, in the notion of source language or culture and target culture, where transformation is the aim and object of the process, but the process itself is translation.<sup>19</sup> It is the transformative possibilities of translation, which is both a political and cultural factor in Wordsworth's poetical project, and, as Julie Carlson argues, in Coleridge's theatrical innovations, particularly in his translations of Schiller.

In my first chapter, as a kind of prologue to the main part of my thesis, I present the meeting of Wordsworth and Coleridge at the point when both of them were attempting to emulate Shakespeare by writing plays of their own, and show how the importance of the human heart and the emotions begins to find expression in their respective dramas. Wordsworth play, *The Borderers*, impressed Coleridge for its particular 'touches of the human heart,' which he found in Shakespeare and Schiller, but in Wordsworth he admires the fact that there are no 'inequalities.' The human heart finds its expression as passion in the plays of Shakespeare which they were presumably reading at the time, since their plays are so obviously indebted to them. But the expression of that passion needed to be made by way of rhetorical strategies which they seem to have become more familiar with through their closer reading of Shakespeare at this time. As Jonathan Wordsworth has argued in *The Music of*

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<sup>19</sup> See particularly Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). on Frye's transformative vision as translation. On the religious aspects of Frye's aesthetics see Robert D. Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004)., and Jeffery Donaldson and Alan Mendelson, eds., *Frye and the Word: Religious Contexts in the Writings of Northrop Frye* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

*Humanity*, it was Coleridge who seems to have been the man of ideas, whilst Wordsworth was more interested in people, but Coleridge venerated Wordsworth's intellect when he first met him, as I note in this first chapter.<sup>20</sup> What each of them was interested in at the time, as I show in this chapter, however, was guilt and remorse, and the relationship of those feelings to their mutual espousal of the revolutionary politics of the time prior to their meeting. By that time, however, each had become disillusioned with the kind of philosophy which Godwin's *Political Justice* had advocated, because it seemed to devalue human emotions and relationships. Each of them, therefore, was interested in looking at the passions as staged in Shakespeare.

I examine the way Coleridge's own play depends for its execution on the staging of leading ideas such as constancy, fidelity, guilt, and remorse, and of which he admits he had too many. The notion of 'leading ideas' brings me to a consideration of what the unifying theme behind *Lyrical Ballads* might be, and I make a case for that being the imagination, as delineated in Theseus' speech on the imagination.

*Lyrical Ballads* reveals the poets' staging of the ways in which imagination functions in the lives of the ordinary men and women. These 'characters' can be loosely defined as lunatics, lovers in many forms, and poets. But they are not sardonically portrayed, as the would-be sceptical philosopher Theseus would at first have it at the beginning of the closing act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The Lunatic, the lover and the Poet  
Are of imagination all compact.  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is the mad man. The lover, all as frantic,

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<sup>20</sup> See Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity : A Critical Study of Wordsworth's Ruined Cottage, Incorporating Texts from a Manuscript of 1799-1800* (London: Nelson, 1969).

Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
 The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from  
     earth to heaven;  
 And as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation and a name. (*MND* V i 7-17)

*Lyrical Ballads* presents these types as suffering as well as rejoicing human beings, and is the barest outline of the process by which Wordsworth was to construct his revolutionary new approach to building a work that would endure 'like one of nature's'.<sup>21</sup> Chapter one, then, is an account of some of the issues uniting Wordsworth and Coleridge, as portrayed in their letters and in the poetry and plays on which they were employed at that time. As Seamus Perry has indicated, at the time of their meeting each was endeavouring to write dramas in the style and spirit of Shakespeare, heavily influenced by the work of Schiller, especially *The Robbers*, itself translated by Alexander Tytler. The failure to get their plays actually produced, however, and Wordsworth's loss of the tenancy at Alfoxden due to Thelwall's visit, set the two poets on the idea of going to Germany, learning the language, and living off translation work.

In Chapters two and three I examine the practical work of translation which first impelled Wordsworth and Coleridge to travel to Germany, and the ways in which Alexander Tytler's book, *Essay on The Principles of Translation*, can be used to further our understanding of how Wordsworth came to write some of the Goslar Lyrics and the two part *Prelude*.<sup>22</sup> Tytler's *Essay* sheds a great deal of light on the

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<sup>21</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XII 312.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (London: Dent, 1907).

actual subject matter of many of Wordsworth's poems of this period, and during his time in Germany. This includes the Lucy poems, 'Expostulation and Reply,' 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', and 'A Night Piece', a version of Homer's verse description, of which Tytler offers a prose paraphrase. Tytler makes a clear distinction between the language of prose and the language of poetry, giving a licence to the poet to use almost whatever language he or she liked. Yet in contradiction to his own 'natural' taste, he admires the 'chaste' pure language of prose above the florid and impassioned language of poetry. This, I suggest, serves as a challenge to Wordsworth, who takes up the standard for a 'pure, chaste, English poetry' to counteract the 'deluges' of German ballads and Gothic horror stories which were then flooding the market, to the detriment of Milton and Shakespeare.

Just why he should have been so much on the attack, as it were, and, as Kenneth Johnston writes, 'at once aggressive and defensive'.<sup>23</sup> in the 1800 'Preface' which accompanied the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, might be answered by the link between Tytler and Robert Burns. Tytler was one of the group of Edinburgh lawyers and academics who had at first encouraged, and then apparently dropped Burns. There is some evidence to suggest that Tytler may have written the infamous obituary of Burns, and this may have been instrumental in Wordsworth's dislike of the man, though he respected many of his principles of translation, contradictory though they might be.

The 'language of conversation' is a topic that Tytler touches on in his delineation of the principles of a good translation, and Wordsworth seems to have picked this point up from Tytler. He uses examples of poetry from Shakespeare and

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<sup>23</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, "Wordsworth's Self-Creation and the New *Lyrical Ballads*." *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads*. ed. Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2001). 95-112. 114.



Homer which are given as examples of the kind of florid language the licensed poet might use, as opposed to the chaste prose of Milton. But in using Pope as an example of the way a poet can ‘embellish’ his original by the use of imagery which is no longer natural but fanciful, he is obviously diverging from his own principles. I show in this chapter how Wordsworth, after making his own version of the same passage, with the help of Dorothy Wordsworth’s observation, begins that process of observation and meditation which was to be the foundation of a new ‘realism’ in poetry. Coleridge later refers to the same passage that Pope translated, in *Biographia Literaria*, in order to clarify just where the controversy about ‘poetic diction’ began.

Tytler’s essay is a useful starting point for examining many of Wordsworth’s theories about poetic language. But it is also instructive in helping to understand Wordsworth’s theory and practice, and Coleridge’s, in relation to the nature of ‘passion’, and its political, social, and religious implications. By using examples from *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, Tytler draws attention to passion, but nowhere in his essay does he really account for the importance of passion as an expressive force in its own right. This was part of the problem with contemporary poetry in general as Wordsworth saw it, in that poetic language is seen by Tytler and the generality of critics as the dress of thought, as though the thought and the language could be isolated from one another in poetry.

From their first meeting at Alfoxden, the ‘poet’s eye’ of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* becomes a point of reference for Dorothy Wordsworth in her letter to Mary Hutchinson, in order to describe the poet Coleridge. During this same period, Coleridge takes upon himself the persona of Nehemiah Higginbottom and, out-parodying Shakespeare’s parody of the poor poet in Bottom, he establishes for himself a role which he will take on again in *Biographia Literaria* in order to stage the birth of

*Lyrical Ballads*, and also, more importantly, to stage how translation itself is and was the process whereby imagination became fancy and vice versa. Coleridge describes the process in his own description of how *Lyrical Ballads* came to be written. The mood of this period is described by Wordsworth himself in *The Prelude* as a ‘wanton[ing] in wilde poesy’ and it is very much this almost comic mood of ‘glee’ which Wordsworth recalls of the time when he wrote ‘The Idiot Boy’:

Let me add that this long poem was composed in the  
groves of Alfoxden, almost extempore; not a word, I  
believe, being corrected, though one stanza was  
omitted. I mention this in gratitude for those happy  
moments, for, in truth, I never wrote anything with so  
much glee.<sup>24</sup>

Chapter four offers a broader analysis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* itself. I look at the play's critical history, and the Romantic reception of the play, using among other critics' comments, Heraud's Kantian account of the play, to fill a gap which is surprisingly left unfilled in Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism by our lack of any evidence as to what he did say about it in detail in his lecture on the play. Heraud hints at Coleridge and Wordsworth as reading the play more philosophically than was generally the case in the period. His acquaintance with them, and particularly with Coleridge, may account for his reference to the 'philosophical poet' whose opinions he cites. I draw upon criticism from Rymer, Pope, and Dryden to show Wordsworth and Coleridge read the play and the functions of imagination which are staged in it, in a far more philosophical and religious sense than most of their Augustan and neo-classical predecessors, but there are unexpected links between Pope's comments on

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<sup>24</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, The Cornell Wordsworth., eds. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1992) 354-51.

Shakespeare and Wordsworth's conception of his own work, in the metaphor of the Gothic cathedral, which Pope uses to define Shakespeare's style.

I examine several aspects of the play in this chapter: 'The Poet's Eye' of Theseus' speech and its importance in pre-Romantic and Romantic criticism, and some of the ways in which Wordsworth uses that speech in his own poetry and prefaces.<sup>25</sup>

I also examine one aspect of the different kinds of 'love' which are staged in the play, that of the Fairy Queen's doting on the changeling boy, and briefly show how Wordsworth stages that aspect of imagination in 'The Idiot Boy,' and the 'Ode'. Coleridge's comments in *Biographia* characterises Betty Foy's actions as the workings of an instinctual love, which is lacking in judgement, and this is taken up by Wordsworth in the poem which he took 'so much glee' in writing. His poem's comedy stems from the original comic context in which he found his theme and form. I also suggest in this chapter that the play stages another aspect of Titania's role in the aesthetic scheme of the play, as Fancy; and relate this to Wordsworth's distinguishing of Fancy and Imagination in the closing books of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth stages the nurturing of his own imagination by beauty and fear, the sublime and the beautiful, danger and desire, and this has roots in Shakespeare's poetic drama.

The 'mechanical' aspects of lyric poetry are made ludicrous material for comedy in the characters of the mechanicals themselves. This feature of *The Dream*, is one of the least noticed elements of the play, but Wordsworth and Coleridge take it up, along with German critics such as Schlegel in their distinguishing, between mechanical and the organic form in poetry. I have not used Coleridge's *Shakespeare Criticism* to any great extent in this thesis, but it would be worthwhile to compare his

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<sup>25</sup> See Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*. (Oxford, 1986).

criticism there with the poetry. I draw on *The Prelude* to show how Wordsworth stages the natural and mechanical features of music, and its effect on his imagination.

I touch intermittently on Wordsworth's *Two Part Prelude* of 1799 and the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* in order to show how his preoccupation with the play developed over the years between 1798 and 1804. I have not been able to examine these two poems in any great detail in this thesis, but I hope to have suggested enough to warrant further study, and an in-depth analysis in further work.

The Ode is the one of the most complex of Wordsworth's treatments of the play, taking elements from the play such as Bottom's propensities for acting, which Shakespeare stages as ludicrous; the changeling boy's mysterious origins; and the fostering of the child by Titania and Oberon, and transforming them, translating or interpreting the play, as it were, into imaginative speculations on immortality. This poem gives us Wordsworth's most philosophical statement of his religious beliefs at the time, and based, as I believe it is, on the play, achieves a somewhat mixed success with critics and readers alike, due to what are seen as incongruities such as the 'pigmy' child philosopher, and immortality brooding like the day, 'a master o'er a slave.' Yet the poem is arguably his greatest lyric achievement, and Wordsworth's always placing it as the final poem in his collections testifies to his lasting declaration of the poem's importance for him. The combination of the ludicrous, the commonplace, and the sublime is one of the paradoxes of the poem, as it is of the play. This, as Coleridge was to say of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria*, is something only Genius is capable of.

The genius of Shakespeare combines the most absurd comedy and the most superb lyricism in a play which many critics find his most sustained effort of genius, and yet it has Bottom in it. He is arguably the most foolish of Shakespeare's comic

buffoons, and also a most entertaining butt of the supposedly wiser Athenians' jokes and sarcasm, as well as Puck's mockery. Yet Bottom the ass is not without a sublimity and grandeur of his own, of the kind Wordsworth was to recognise in his own early encounters with shepherds, and was to make the basis of his claim for the sublimity and moral dignity of the most humble of men and women. I refer to St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, which Bottom misquotes in the play, at various points in my thesis, as it is, I believe, of fundamental importance to our understanding of the religious or ethical implications of Wordsworth's poetry. The misquotation, or mistranslation, of St. Paul cannot disguise the fundamental meaning that the verse is about the imagination, and its relation to faith or belief. The issues that Paul has to deal with in Corinth are those staged in the play: marriage, judgement, language, and imagination. At the heart of the matter is Bottom, whose foolish wisdom of love represents a stumbling block to the Jews and to the philosophic wisdom of the Greeks.

In chapter five I compare Wordsworth's ballad 'The Last of The Flock' with *The Merchant of Venice*, using it to illustrate Wordsworth's process of imitation and transposition of Shakespeare. I use the ballad to show how Wordsworth transposes the tone of a speech from the play, and transforms the character of Shylock, transporting him from Venice's streets to an English public way and to the quieter, but equally uncharitable, England of the Napoleonic wars. The ballad re-stages what Rene Girard calls Shakespeare's 'Theatre of Envy' in the play, as well as Shylock's divided sense of himself in his roles as a father and a wealthy business man. This short poem is as complex in its nuanced treatment of character, setting, and motive as anything in the play. It helps us to understand how Wordsworth 'read' and translated Shakespeare.

Chapter six discusses Wordsworth's 'history homely and rude,' *Michael*. This poem is perhaps the most overt, and yet subtly nuanced of Wordsworth's translations

of Shakespeare, and also his most politically nuanced poem. Wordsworth's letter to Charles James Fox, and those to other prominent figures of the day, which accompanied presentation copies of *Lyrical Ballads* 1800, clarify, together with his comments on the poem, the historically contingent grounding of the poems in the political and religious climate during the year of the poem's publication. In this chapter, I argue that *Richard II* is behind the poem, and in particular the character of John of Gaunt, who is transformed into the shepherd Michael. The poem has been shown by critics to draw on the sacrifice of Isaac, and the parable of the prodigal son, for its structural and thematic grounding, but by comparing the poem with the play, I show how, in fact, it is 'the history homely and rude' Wordsworth claims it to be. By transforming history as a genre, Wordsworth gives his shepherd the status of the Kings and Dukes which Shakespeare's play stages as tragic history, giving his lowly characters the dignity they were often denied in contemporary society, and certainly in literature.

Wordsworth's political stance in the poem is complex. It hinges on the importance of property, landed property, in the cultivation of patriotic allegiances. Wordsworth is staging here, and makes us conscious of, the sometimes 'naturally' selfish motives of what were seen as idealistic or selfless virtues. Wordsworth's character of Michael, the landowner based on Gaunt, comes from his reading of Shakespeare's *Richard II*.

Wordsworth's letter to Thomas Poole in which he tells him he had something of his character in mind when depicting Michael, also gives us some indication of the difficulties Wordsworth had in translating or transforming, the most famous of Gaunt's speeches, the valorisation of England, into an essential element of his own poem. In the letter he includes some further lines which attempt to give Michael the

occasional inclination to form ‘conceits’ of his own, and he asks Poole whether he thinks these lines would be suited to the poem. Poole’s education and appreciation of poetry might well have been in Wordsworth’s mind, but I think that he realised, as Coleridge writes later of Gaunt’s speech, that the speech itself is couched in the poetic, indeed fanciful, language of a more educated man than Michael, and the ‘thoughts’ that he wished to give the shepherd remained unpublished.<sup>26</sup>

Wordsworth, however, is interested not merely in Gaunt’s situation and his political role, but in Shakespeare’s portrayal of him as a father and brother, a cousin and a husband. The typically Shakespearean presentation of the historical as involving the personal, as well as the political, is exploited by Wordsworth to serve the ends of a more democratic, yet, ultimately, radically conservative poetry.

The history of John of Gaunt, becomes ‘homely and rude’ by dwelling not on those points which make men different, but on those points of similarity, and shows that ‘men who do not wear fine clothes’ can be both suitable subjects of tragedy and the focus for a re-staging of those changes wrought by the ‘noisy years’ of political upheaval and revolution. Wordsworth’s more local and domestic histories are as dramatic in their consequences for the individuals involved as that of Bolingbroke’s usurpation of Richard and make room in poetry for far quieter transformations in the history of aesthetics and public taste. Wordsworth’s poetry records ‘things gone silently out of mind’ rather than ‘violently destroyed’ (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* 1802). Such tragic heroes form the subject of Wordsworth’s poetry and are as localised and individual as ‘a single field’ or ‘a Tree, of many, one’ (‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’) and are at a far remove from the grander historical vision of

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<sup>26</sup> See William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt. Rev. Chester L. Shaver, 2nd ed., 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). 322-324.

dynasties brought down by violent revolution. As Wordsworth states in the Preface of 1802, 'the Poet binds together by Passion and Knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and all time.' By combining the past and the present, and local and remote settings in an act of transformation, Wordsworth binds together, through the medium of our common human heart, the poetry of all ages. The 'opposites' which are united here are bound together by the emotions.

Chapter seven, 'Comic Transformations in *Biographia Literaria*', brings my thesis almost to a conclusion with the publication of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, in which I read Coleridge as answering not only his and Wordsworth's critics, but Wordsworth's Preface to his poems of 1815. Coleridge takes the narrative plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, its excursion from city to forest, and leads us on a convoluted dance through the various educative and misleading tracks which translation takes him through. His final tracking of a 'bewildered visionary' in the forest takes the form of a translation of Coleridge himself into an ass of sorts, and stages the poet's meeting with the German giants of Intellect and Nature, Kant and Schelling. His eventual spellbound entrapment in the maze of metaphysical speculation, which is Schelling's Nature Philosophy, is only broken into by the intervention of a friend, who directs his attention to the more congenial validity of the human heart and the importance of feeling, and the equation of imagination with faith, hope and charity. Combining this with the digressive style of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, his fanciful and fancified 'character' in Thelwall's drama, Coleridge creates his own version or translation of the play, which Wordsworth had translated and transformed into a poem on the growth of his own mind. Coleridge's version is however 'a tale obscure of high and passionate thoughts / To a strange music chanted,' whereas Wordsworth produced a 'song divine of truth to its own music



chaunted'. The one seems to use the native tongue, the other, Coleridge's, is full of foreign or 'strange' tongues.

The most controversial aspect of *Biographia* has been, of course, Coleridge's plagiarisms, especially of Schelling. I argue, however, that it is yet another form of translation which Coleridge stages in his 'adoption' of Schelling's transcendental philosophy and chants to a 'strange' music, in a very German tone at this point. In the character of Bottom/Schelling Coleridge is himself translated in the process. As he points out just before he is translated, in the translated words of De Salvator Rosa, we are about to expect the appearance of an ass.

For if I err not in calculating the points,  
An asinine star seems to rule us, and the  
Donkey and the Mule are in conjunction.  
Let the time of Apuleius be named no more!  
For if then one Man alone seemed an Ass,  
A thousand Asses in my day resemble Men<sup>27</sup>

If Coleridge and Wordsworth seemed like asses to their critics they were none-the-less aware of the purposes, political and social, yet profoundly religious and ethical, for which they espoused the wisdom of the fool and the foolishness of love, which is Shakespeare's, and his own imagination's, peculiar dower. Translation and transformation of Shakespeare are part of their programme of reform which they hoped would re-educate their readers in the process of giving them 'pleasure.'

Wordsworth's transformation of the character of the high born Duke into the lowly shepherd Michael is typical of the poet's approach to poetry at the time. This was to be described by Hazlitt as partaking of the revolutionary 'spirit of the age', and

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<sup>27</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*. I, 167. This is the last thing written in the chapter titled, in part, 'Obligations to Schelling.' The chapters following this are 'digressions' from this point, and anecdotes, before Coleridge translates Schelling in chapter 12, 'Requests and Premonitions.'

his account of Wordsworth's 'levelling' muse in which peasants are levelled with kings and 'all the trappings of verse...all the high places of poetry'<sup>28</sup> are 'swept to the ground' by his popular inartificial style, is itself a product of that other spirit of the age, the valorisation of Shakespeare as the poet of England. His own characterisation of the great political and literary 'characters' of his age draws on Shakespeare's language and characterisation to depict the qualities or actions of his chosen men, lacing his descriptions with quotation and epithets from Shakespeare as well as others. In Hazlitt's *My First Acquaintance with Poets*, however, I also trace elements of the veiled plot and characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from which Hazlitt recreates the summer in Alfoxden, when he found himself a guest at the dawning of that new age in poetry. His descriptions of Wordsworth's 'muse', and even his physical portrait of Wordsworth, smacks of the comic character of the asinine Bottom, who is contrasted with the more Puckish Coleridge, even down to their preferred methods of composing in the open air.

Hazlitt's account of this meeting, written after Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* had been published, uses the same sort of obscure hints and suggestiveness, which I argue Coleridge uses in *Biographia*, to create his own version of his meeting with Wordsworth, and the creation of *Lyrical Ballads*, the collaboration and combination of the supernatural or the metaphysical with the literal and ordinary. But this is a wistful, elegiac account of a 'dream' which has perhaps not fully materialised. Hazlitt also refers in this account to Wordsworth's claims about the 'originality' of his poetry, though based on the work of others. I relate Hazlitt's account to the play which, as I claim throughout this thesis, was of profound importance to their work: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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<sup>28</sup> William Hazlitt. *The Spirit of the Age*. (Grasmere, Cumbria: The Wordsworth Trust, 2004). 204.

I close this account of the relationship of *Lyrical Ballads* to this play by returning to those Alfoxden days with which my thesis began, and to Coleridge's poems, 'The Nightingale', itself a transformation of elements of the play. I show how the sonnet accompanying the poem makes comic currency out of the rhyme scheme by playing and punning on Bottom's name. The 'character of the poet', as I suggest in this thesis, can be better understood by linking it with Bottom's role in the play. Wordsworth and Coleridge's project, with Hazlitt as the historian of the birth of *Lyrical Ballads*, the 'genesis' of the poems, could be characterised as a meeting of minds, a marriage which eventually broke down, but which took its initial impulses from a character who determines he will get his friend to write a ballad of his dream. The ballads of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Peter Bell* are in a direct line of descent from Shakespeare.

In *Michael* Wordsworth refers to what he hopes will be a 'few natural hearts' and 'youthful poets' who will be his 'second self' when he is gone. In this thesis I show that while Wordsworth rejects a portion of his poetic inheritance in the form of gaudy 'poetic diction,' he restages the imaginative forms of Shakespeare in order to write a poetry of the heart, and to make what has been considered mean and low, the people and their imaginative lives, his subject matter. Wordsworth transforms the poetry of Shakespeare in order to make a poetry of the people. Writers like James Joyce and Seamus Heaney recognise their debts to Wordsworth, and through him to Shakespeare, in the kind of poetry and prose which they write themselves. I conclude my thesis by staging again the 'secondary imagination' of Joyce, as he pays homage to Wordsworth and Shakespeare.

# Chapter 1 Meetings and Divergences: Shakespeare as Presider

## 1. Character, Drama, and the Human Heart

The meeting of the two poets of *Lyrical Ballads* has been variously described as epoch making, revolutionary or, as Lucy Newlyn <sup>29</sup> less dramatically writes, ‘important’. <sup>30</sup> Newlyn conjectures that the more likely attraction for Coleridge of the Wordsworth he had encountered in 1793 in the poetry of *Descriptive Sketches* was his markedly republican values and the political optimism of the poem’s ‘millenarian conclusion:’

Lo! from th’ innocuous flames, a lovely birth!

With its own virtues springs another earth:

Nature, as in her prime, her virgin reign

Begins, and Love and Truth compose her train...

By the time of their first actual meeting, however, both Wordsworth and Coleridge had already found themselves disillusioned with the possibility of social or political reform through the agency of a Godwinian Reason. What was a short time later to impress Coleridge even more than Wordsworth’s republicanism was his drama, *The Borderers*.

Writing to Cottle two days after he had heard Wordsworth read the play he describes it as ‘absolutely wonderful’ finding in it ‘those *profound* touches of the

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<sup>29</sup> Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986) 9.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Roe reminds us of the historical development of critical evaluations of the ‘importance’ of the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in his essay ‘Renewing *Lyrical Ballads*’ in Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry, eds., *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads* (Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan, 2001), 224-38. Roe traces the gradual elevation of Wordsworth to the status of ‘prophet poet’ of the ‘Coleridgean tradition...(of) Kermode, Geoffrey Hartman, M. H. Abrams, and Harold Bloom — all inhabitants of the high places of Romantic criticism’, (235), to the detriment of the popular or low tradition. Whilst this is an important point, which this thesis focuses on, we should also be aware of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s own conceptions of their roles as ‘prophet’ poets, and that Wordsworth thought of himself as a teacher as well as a poet. Abrams’ focus is more on the Wordsworth who is, as it were, still en route to *Lyrical Ballads* (and the bulk of the poetry published in his own life-time) in the narrative which is *The Prelude*.

human heart which I find two or three times in 'The Robbers' of Schiller. And often in Shakespeare.'<sup>31</sup> That same letter concludes with the incredible statement that 'T. Poole's opinion of Wordsworth is, that he is the greatest Man, he ever knew — I coincide.' Poole had obviously met Wordsworth some time, probably at Nether Stowey as an earlier letter suggests, but that in so short a period such eulogies should emerge ought to tell us something about which of the two poets was considered to have the greater intellect.

During the previous six months, Coleridge had been busy writing his own play *Osorio*, commissioned by Sheridan expressly as a tragedy and Shakespeare heavily influenced the subject matter of each of the plays, if not the characterization. Although Coleridge's direct sources have been given as Schiller's *Der Geisterseher* and *Die Rauber*, and Ottway's *The Orphan* 'with *Hamlet* as the connecting link,'<sup>32</sup> allusions to or echoes of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and even *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and their inter-related themes of madness, dreams, superstition, derangement, guilt, ambition, love, presentiments, nightmares all seem to make a fleeting appearance, squeezed into a vehicle which is too flimsy to carry so much weight. As Coleridge himself writes in the preliminaries added to MSS 5:

-Worse than all - the growth of *Osorio*'s character is nowhere explained- & yet I had most clear and psychologically accurate ideas of the whole of it... Such were some of my leading ideas...It furnished me with one important Lesson — namely — that to have

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956). I 325.

<sup>32</sup> *Osorio*. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol 16. Poetical Works*, Bollingen Series 75, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2001). III i, introduction. This edition is hereafter referred to as *CC*.

conceived strongly does not always imply the power of successful execution.<sup>33</sup>

In meeting Wordsworth Coleridge recognizes or reads as a failing in his own play, not simply the vital importance of the human heart, for he emphasizes it enough in *Osorio* in terms of the actual dialogue, but the necessity for the poet to engage the reader's sympathy dramatically with his characters as well as with the 'ideas' which he attempts to express. The close reading of Shakespeare which each of the poets engaged in at the time led them, I shall argue, to imitate as much of Shakespeare's techniques as was possible without continually resorting to direct quotation or allusion, a practice which seems, as Jonathan Bate recognizes, to have been more common, or pointedly meant to be recognized by the reader, in their later poetry.<sup>34</sup>

This emphasis on the 'human heart' was to become for Coleridge, a matter of profound importance. His own play *Osorio* would seem to illustrate an early understanding of this. The play opens with a dialogue between the heroine, Maria and her father-in-law Velez. The reason Maria gives for not marrying Osorio, her husband's brother, as his father Velez wishes her to, is that she will

'...remain / Faithful to Albert, be he dead or living.' (I i 6) Velez sees her as 'The victim of a useless constancy.' (I i 17) He determines that he '...must not see (her) WRETCHED.' (I i 18). It is almost comical that Coleridge assumes that the capitalization and later underlining of the word were in some way vital in order to convey to the audience, (by the actor shouting out the 'idea' perhaps?) the required judgment they *must* make of that which follows.<sup>35</sup> Maria launches into a long speech,

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<sup>33</sup> CC 16. III i, 150.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*. (Oxford, 1986), 108-116. Bate sees Wordsworth as making his allusions to Shakespeare more direct in later revisions of *The Prelude*, using more quotation marks in the 1850 version. See Bate page 112, on 1850, vii. 288.

<sup>35</sup> Later, Coleridge included a sprightly, comic criticism of this use of orthography in his letter to Cottle enclosing copies of his Nehemiah Higginbottom sonnets: '...flat lines forced into poetry by

which recounts her daily scanning of the ocean for her husband's return. Her narration does not allow us to 'picture' or imagine her 'wretchedness' (the word is repeated four times in one form or another throughout the speech) however, as she watches 'those skiey tints'.

Or in the sultry hour beneath some rock.  
My hair dishevel'd by the pleasant sea breeze,  
To shape sweet visions, and live o'er again  
All past hours of delight; if it be wretched  
To watch some Bark, and fancy Albert there;  
To go through each minutest circumstance  
Of the blest meeting; and to frame adventures  
Most terrible and strange, and hear him tell them;

(I i 21-29)

What we see in the above extracts from *Osorio* is an example of the ideas or the motivating conceptions behind the creation of this scene: notions of constancy or fidelity, the role of imagination and fancy (not yet distinguished I would say), and of course wretchedness and human suffering. In the scene which opens Coleridge's play, he stages imagination at work in Maria as she imagines her husband's future return and as she dwells on memories of the past. Wretchedness, the idea of it, is expressed in what Maria does and says so that we may understand it. We are asked to imagine it, not to rationalize it. Coleridge's expectation in this scene was perhaps that articulating the idea of it would be enough. But how are we to truly sympathise with it? How are we to bind the ideal and the contingent? Coleridge's attempt at wretchedness is in his own words a partial failure. Perhaps it is that we do not learn Maria's story. Or that

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Italics (signifying how mouthishly the author would read them).' Coleridge, Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I, 212. This edition subsequently referred to as *CL*.

we do not have enough in this sketch of a play, as Coleridge called it, to really engage with the characters over any length of time. Compared with the length of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's longest play, *Osorio* is indeed a sketch. As Hamlet says of his own woe or wretchedness, which, as Gertrude points out, seems so particular to him:

Seems, Madame! Nay, it is; I know not seems.  
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly. These indeed, seem;  
For they are actions that a man might play;  
But I have that within which passes show –  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(*Ham* I ii 76-85)

The difference between Coleridge's wretched character and Shakespeare's is in the passion which is barely disguised in the expression, and which utilizes the rhetorical figure of repetition that is one of the characteristic expressions of passion which Wordsworth points out in his note to 'The Thorn.'<sup>36</sup> A reading of *Hamlet* as a character who, after meeting his father's ghost, is determined to cut himself off from all fellow feeling would render him lacking in human sympathy:

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<sup>36</sup> The Fenwick Notes, cited in Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*. 354. Wordsworth emphasises the power of words as symbols of the passion, but more particularly as 'things active and efficient, which are themselves part of the passion.' The repetitions are dramatic expressions of emotion, which in themselves convey Hamlet's passion here.



Yea, from the table of my memory  
 I'll wipe all trivial fond records,  
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
 That youth and observation copied there,  
 And thy commandment all alone shall live  
 Within the book and volume of my brain  
 Unmixed with baser matter.' (I v 98-104)

No sooner has he said this, of course, than he writes down in his tables the very unwise saw, the one generalization which will prejudice his relationships with almost everyone from that moment on, 'one may smile and smile and be a villain' (I v 108 ).

Wordsworth became entangled in metaphysical and philosophical speculations which demand generalization and system at the expense of particularity, after his return from France, and during that period when the course of events made conflicting impacts upon his allegiances. At this point in his career Wordsworth immersed himself in a universalising geometry, in order to avoid confronting the political and moral questions which so troubled him in his quest for answers to the ethical problem of the violence of the 'Terror' which followed the French revolution, his country's war with France, and his unwavering ideals of liberty. Remembering that *Osorio* was partly based on *Hamlet*, it is pertinent here to note that Coleridge famously describes Hamlet as a character who is essentially 'immethodical.'<sup>37</sup>

We have said that Method results from a balance  
 between the passive impression received from outward

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<sup>37</sup> Coleridge's critique of the character of Hamlet is more commonly read in his Shakespeare lectures, but in the *Treatise on Method* it forms part of a more inclusive theory, taking in the principles of Baconian scientific experiment as well as philosophical enquiry. This later version gives us Coleridge at his most lucid with regard to his claim for Shakespeare's status as the philosophical poet par excellence. The essay appears to me to clarify much of Coleridge's criticism and praise of Wordsworth, by suggesting that it may be obscurity in his poetry, as much as in Coleridge's writing, which has caused problems in the reception of the poetry.

things, and the internal activity of the mind in reflecting and generalizing; but neither Hamlet nor the Hostess holds this balance accurately...In attending too exclusively to the relations which the past or passing events and objects bear to general truth, and the moods of his own mind, the most intelligent man is sometimes in danger of overlooking that other relation, in which they are likewise to be placed *to the apprehension and sympathies of his hearers*. [my emphasis] His discourse appears like a soliloquy intermixed with dialogue, But the uneducated and unreflecting talker overlooks all mental relations, and consequently precludes all method, that is not purely accidental.<sup>38</sup>

Coleridge then goes on to characterize Shakespeare as pre-eminently the poet and dramatist who follows Horace's dictum when introducing a new theme or fresh character, to give it that methodical unity of self consistency from beginning to end.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, the character of Hamlet, determined from the outset like Richard III (by himself or by Shakespeare?) to be lacking in human sympathy, perhaps even lacking in imagination, (why for example is he unable to comprehend how a player can weep for Hecuba?) could be said to be in some sense, heartless, though not without passion. Coleridge goes on to praise Shakespeare's other way of 'following an accurate philosophic Method' in the exhibition of 'passion', quoting Schlegel as he does so, in order to support his own long held theories:

“...taking this word [passion] in its widest signification, as including every mental condition, every tone from indifference or familiar mirth, to the widest rage and

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<sup>38</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol.11. Shorter Works and Fragments*, Bollingen Series 75, eds. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols. (London; Princeton, NJ: Routledge; Princeton University Press, 1995). I, 652-53.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 654. Quoted from Horace, *The Art of Poetry* 125-6, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. (LCL, 1926), 461.

despair. He gives us the history of minds: he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions.” This last is a profound and exquisite remark: and it necessarily implies, that Shakespeare contemplated ideas, in which alone are involved conditions and consequences *ad infinitum*.

That which *binds* the contingent and the ideal is the human heart or the emotions which have their seat in the mind but are expressed through the body and in language, and which, together with the *requisite* judgment (what Wordsworth is to oppose to ‘taste’ in the prefaces) actually enable us to feel for or with other human beings, as well as to engage with poetry spontaneously rather than from prejudice.<sup>40</sup> It is in this sense, with the principle of imagination as the foundation of his theorising, and the human heart as his constant measure of truth, that Coleridge’s aesthetic, political and, more importantly for him, (and for the later Wordsworth, as John Jones traces in *The Egotistical Sublime*)<sup>41</sup> his *theological* beliefs were never actually ‘officially surpassed,’ but they would appear to have been Trinitarian rather than Unitarian, and providential rather than necessarian.<sup>42</sup>

Coleridge’s tri-part doctrine of poetry was that a ‘poet’s *heart* and *intellect* should be combined, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of

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<sup>40</sup> See Michael O'Neill, "Lyrical Ballads And "Pre-Established Codes of Decision", " *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads*, eds. Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry, Romanticism in Perspective: Texts, Cultures, Histories (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave, 2001). Taking as his cue Wordsworth’s crucial determinant of what might constitute his ideal reader, O'Neill examines Wordsworth’s subtle use of such prejudice as a theme or unifying idea in many of the poems: 'Lyrical Ballads takes as a central topic the issue of 'pre-established codes' sometimes contesting, always making us look hard at, agreed norms of behaviour, judgment, and feeling.' 124.

<sup>41</sup> John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954).

<sup>42</sup> For an account of Coleridge’s religious development in relationship to his writing and philosophy see Ronald C. Wendling, *Coleridge's Progress to Christianity: Experience and Authority in Religious Faith* (Lewisburg, PA; London: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1995). See also Basil Willey, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972). House is perhaps the most pertinent to this chapter as his emphasis on the importance of the emotions and the will in Coleridge’s critical theory links these to the poetry more than to his philosophy: Humphry House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures; 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953). See especially chapter VI, 'Creation, Emotion and Will', 142-156.

*Nature*.<sup>43</sup> If the human heart is lacking then all we do have is a divided contingency and idealism, opposites which Coleridge consistently and doggedly tried to unite. What Basil Willey traces in Coleridge's thought is the development of his gradual Trinitarian faith with regard to his religion, and the centrality of the incarnation to that faith. The notion of faith, fidelity, or constancy and the centrality of the emotions or the human heart, (which can only assent to the 'truths' of religious faith in the light of its own responses), and which for Coleridge and Wordsworth is beyond the grasp of discursive reasoning, was to become intimately connected with their theories of the imagination, moral and ethical life.

Constancy, however, when applied to the field of human emotions just does not fit because the emotions are indicators of *change* in our condition not constancy. It is here that the imagination, its transformative power or modifying power, is linked to the emotional transitions which characterize our relationships with the world. It is this centrality of the human emotions, earth's 'humblest mirth and tears' (*Peter Bell*, 135) that unites Coleridge and Wordsworth's aesthetic doctrine of the imagination and the 'accidents' which Seamus Perry notes as the opposite of the inevitability or necessity of a good poem. Accidents of history, which are not fictions, may well be the indicators of and the triggers for the emotions that distinguish the human from the ideal. It is the accidents of history, which Wordsworth draws upon for the emotional triggers of some of his poems, whether in the form of 'true' local stories or as history staged in plays, poems, and ballads.

In research into the emotions, theories have been put forward which attempt to categorise the function of the emotions. Evolutionary theorists link the emotions with inbuilt reactions to change, and the impulse to flight or fight, or the failure to re-act.

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<sup>43</sup> *CL* II 459, (10 Sept. 1802). This letter to Sotheby also tells of the 'radical differences' which Coleridge thinks may underlie the different conceptions he and Wordsworth have of poetry.

They suggest that emotions are signals which may relate to our readiness for action when the goals and plans which we have or make, whether they are ongoing in the moment or projected for the future, probable, or merely possible, are confronted by a need to respond to changes in our perceptions. The emotions then are seen as central to our condition and to our ability to adapt and survive.<sup>44</sup>

Coleridge's criticism of some of Wordsworth's poetry in the second volume of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* is partly directed at what he sees as an unexpected excess of the accidental at the expense of the *unifying idea* which might otherwise be perceptible to the reader. It must be said that Coleridge is sometimes right in this respect, as the apparent triviality which sometimes puzzles the reader has rendered the poems equally problematic for criticism, and that remains equally true of Coleridge's own more obscure contribution to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. Perry's excellent but perplexed reading of *The Ancient Mariner* is a case in point. The poem's resistance to explication has similarly led critics to what Perry calls in discussing Wordsworth's *Michael* 'an insoluble puzzle at the heart of the poem.'<sup>45</sup>

Wordsworth later writes in the Fenwick notes of many of the 'accidental' meetings and observations which led to his poetry,<sup>46</sup> but this may be seen as falling somewhat short of the whole story if we consider what other sources of inspiration or

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the emotions in which he seeks 'to explore some of the issues that were introduced into literature by the Romantics and thereby re-establish the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian threads in psychological understandings of emotions', see Keith Oatley, *Best Laid Schemes: The Psychology of Emotions* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 3. Oatley draws on several sources, including literary narrative, to explore the central role of the emotions in human psychology and behaviour, interestingly suggesting that in classical epics, such as Homer's *Odyssey*, a God or Goddess always appears at emotional transition points in the narrative in order to direct action. Though the gods 'appear' to control all actions, as fate, they may have represented figuratively what is simply beyond our conscious control, the emotions or our re-actions to external events, interruptions to goals, or the denial of our desires, and are structurally linked to changes in plans.

<sup>45</sup> Perry, (1999), 182.

<sup>46</sup> See William Wordsworth, *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993). Other references to the genesis of some the poems are in Dorothy Wordsworth's journals and letters, as well as Wordsworth's own notes to the poems in the 1798 Advertisement, and the 1800 and 1802 editions.

unifying ideas engendered some of those ‘persons and characters’ of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, as Coleridge was later to speak of them in *Biographia Literaria*.<sup>47</sup> This is an interesting distinction that Coleridge makes. Characters such as the narrator of ‘The Thorn’ may be no real person at all. The only part of the poem which Wordsworth claims he observed is the thorn itself, and persons such as the leech gatherer whom he did meet may be no ‘character’ with a literary provenance such as the ‘Ancient Mariner’ is. There is though a difference perhaps, as Perry shows, in what each of them understood by character, Wordsworth seeming to veer towards a definition of character linked to occupation, and Coleridge towards personality type. The one is dependent on the constraints and circumstances of accidental or inessential qualities, the other on natural or inherent traits which were common to all.<sup>48</sup>

The focus each of them placed on ‘character’ when they left for Germany in 1798 may be illustrated in Wordsworth’s turn towards an interest in character (rather than philosophical ideas about states of mind, or simply the ‘human mind’ as evinced in *Lyrical Ballads* 1798), in a letter written to Coleridge in Germany on the differences between Bürger’s and Burns’ poetry.<sup>49</sup> The same emphasis is shown in the kind of ‘character’ hunting which Coleridge was pursuing, as evidenced in his letters to his wife, subsequently published as ‘Satyrane’s Letters’ in *The Friend*, and included as a necessary post-script in *Biographia Literaria*. This record of observed characters was to form a journal, as much a product of ‘accidental’ meetings as

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<sup>47</sup> BL II 8.

<sup>48</sup> Perry analyses these differences of emphasis in the theories and poetry in very great detail, but generally in terms of a binary opposition which generally discusses opposites rather than complexities, or what Coleridge would later call opposites which are united in a synthesised whole, rather than contraries which cannot be reconciled. See Wheeler (1980), 47-58, on polarity in Coleridge’s thought in relation to *Biographia Literaria*. Perry sees the division in Coleridge’s thought as consistently ‘waver[ing] between idealism and realism with ‘a tenacious realism persisting alongside the growing sway of his idealism.’ (Perry, 2001). 4 -5.

<sup>49</sup> See Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Early Years 1787-1805*. 255-56. This edition is subsequently referred to as *EY*.

anything Dorothy or Wordsworth himself had espoused. The letters make the seeking out of characters as much a goal of the trip as learning the language or studying natural history.<sup>50</sup> So right from the start of their collaborative friendship, there are shared interests which may have taken different directions whilst envisaging a common goal, a unity of interest which was more inclusive than that which oppositional approaches seem to suggest.

What are we to make too of Coleridge's original claims to their publisher that there was indeed a unity of conception which linked the poems each of them had offered to him. Coleridge's letter to Joseph Cottle of June 1798 reveals an almost comically frantic insistence that the poems should be published in one volume, as the volumes offered were:

to a certain degree one work, in kind tho' not in degree,  
as an ode is one work and that our different poems are  
as stanzas, good relatively rather than absolutely.<sup>51</sup>

The two poets seem to have spent the rest of their lives redefining or refining their attempts at an explanation of the motivating impulse or of the theory behind the poems, yet neither seemed quite able to do this to the other's satisfaction. We, as critics and readers are still trying to 'figure it out' two hundred years later. My own attempt links the volume with Shakespeare and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In attempting to elucidate what kind of an ode Coleridge might have had in mind in his letter, I would offer as a possibility an Ode to Imagination, in which the differing poems stage the ways in which imagination and fancy function in the lives of these persons and characters. Taking Theseus' speech on imagination as a starting point,

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<sup>50</sup> CL I 254. 'This day enriched me with characters—and I passed it merrily. Each of these characters I will delineate to you in my journal....Indeed they present a rich feast for a dramatist.' The letters were later rewritten as 'Satyrane's Letters' in *The Friend* and *Biographia Literaria*.

<sup>51</sup> CL I 411-412. Quoted in Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*. 12.

lunatics (of every shade of lunacy), lovers and poets could well define the various kinds of character which many of the poems depict.

What can be fairly confidently assumed is that during the period when they were both reading their respective plays to each other, between high-spirited ramblings about the hills and dales of Somerset, they were also reading and discussing Shakespeare. Coleridge's frustrated perplexity as to how Shakespeare managed to create such seemingly impossible effects in his plays impelled him to attempt his own Shakespearean drama, though much influenced by Schiller.<sup>52</sup> The failure to get their own plays staged was partly due to their lack of dramaturgical skills. On setting out to write *Osorio* and *The Borderers* neither had any real knowledge of either stagecraft or of structuring a drama in the manner of Shakespeare. However, they both knew their Shakespeare extremely well and, as Jonathan Bate shows, so did their public.<sup>53</sup>

At the time of that first meeting, Wordsworth had recently taken an insignificant figure from Southey's *Joan of Arc* and refashioned her, not simply to 'make a political point,' as Lucy Newlyn comments, but to emphasize her suffering. 'The Ruined Cottage focuses intently on Margaret's state of mind.' As Newlyn points out, the states of mind of the protagonists in the two poets' own attempts at tragedy are also fore-grounded. Conceived, as Newlyn reads him, as a motivated version of Iago, Wordsworth's 'Mortimer anticipates not just the obscurity and darkness of his future lot, but the dignity which isolation brings:'

I will wander on

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<sup>52</sup> See Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures where Coleridge is noted to have asked, and attempted to explain to himself and his audience, 'How was it done?' See also John Payne Collier's notes to Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol. 5. Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, Bollingen Series 75, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987). 1359.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Bate comments that the demand for editions and 'the assimilation of phrases into everyday speech' made Shakespeare's place in 'the heart of the people' in the eighteenth century one which often differed greatly from that which he held in 'the minds of the critics.' Bate (1986), 8.



Living by mere intensity of thought,  
A thing by pain and thought compelled to live,  
Yet loathing life, till heaven in mercy strike me  
With blank forgetfulness – that I may die. (V iii.271-75)<sup>54</sup>

I rather think, though, that we are not meant to see Mortimer's pain as a form of dignity, but of the workings of despair. This perpetual pain and 'thought' which Mortimer convinces himself *is* that which will drive his wanderings, is the same perpetual sense of guilt which drives the mariner. It is the self-generated spirit of punishment and retribution which drives the ship returning from the south to the line, and, as the ship travels northwards, that is projected onto the fanciful figures of death and death-in-life which continues the process in a figured or objectified form beyond that line. The extremes of imagination and fancy could be said to operate in *The Ancient Mariner* as a process which takes the mariner from the one extreme of guilt and despair to the equally extravagant, or wandering notion, suggested by his assumption that he has achieved redemption solely through being shriven, taking part in attendance at chapel with his fellow Christians, and seeing beauty in everything that nature offers to him. This seems like a denial of joy; in fact the failure of the mariner to accept joy as a part of life seems to me a denial of life, staging itself the 'death-in-life' of the mariner's vision. The wedding guest misses the celebration because he has been spellbound by the tale of suffering, and so have we as readers, compelling as that tale is.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Newlyn, (1986), 12. 'In dramatic terms, he is based on Iago, but his alienation is motivated, as Iago's never is.' Ibid. 12.

<sup>55</sup> For a general overview of recent criticism of the poem see Paul Fry, ed., *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Complete, Authoritative Texts of the 1798 and 1817 Versions*, (Boston; New York: Bedford; St. Martin's, 1999).

## 2. Shakespeare and Imaginative Space

The emphasis on wandering in the writing of both poets at this time places the errors of particular religious faiths or sects squarely within their most compelling concerns at the period when they themselves met. In Alfoxden, moreover, one could say that Shakespeare was the imaginative space where these apparently incompatible extremes of idealism and particularity, which Perry examines in Coleridge's work, first surfaced as possibilities for a new kind of poetry. The extremes of the necessary and the accidental, as well as idealism and accident (two different applications of the same latter word which must be desynonymised if we are to locate their real differences) do meet in the religious impulse behind their writings about wandering. Wandering or error is then one of the leading ideas which could be said to lie at the heart of the project which became *Lyrical Ballads*.

Coleridge's Osorio character was indeed originally conceived from too many 'leading ideas,' as he writes in his preliminaries to the play; ideas which Coleridge was unable to successfully stage at that point, but he too is driven into 'a most atrocious guilt.'<sup>56</sup> The play, amongst the other sources which I have noted, 'draws heavily on Macbeth,' and with, as Newlyn suggests, the probable help of Wordsworth, Coleridge managed in the second half of the play to more fully develop Osorio's character, 'In a scene which vividly recalls *The Borderers*,' Osorio tells his own life story:

He walked alone,

And phantasies, unsought for troubled him...

... why babblest thou of guilt ?

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<sup>56</sup> *Osorio*, Preface, from MS1 (EHC ii. 1114 ). Quoted in Newlyn, (1986), 15.

The deed was done, and it passed fairly off.

And he, whose tale I tell thee – dost thou listen?

(IV i. 92-3, 108-10)<sup>57</sup>

Not only is some of the language, and the disturbed conscience of Macbeth alluded to here, but one can also detect in the broken phrasing and more passionate expression, something of the crazed voice of that ‘grey-beard loon’ of *The Ancient Mariner*, rather than Shakespeare’s ‘cream-faced loon’ (*Mac.* V iii 11). As Newlyn points out, that poem was a mere two months away. Giving up on their joint efforts to write a piece on the theme of guilt based on the wanderings of Cain, the two broke up into laughter, according to Wordsworth, and Coleridge wrote *The Ancient Mariner* instead; a ballad that had already been conceived while on a walking or wandering tour.

Given their mutual interest in Shakespeare, and judging from the rather farcical accounts of the conception of the *The Ancient Mariner* related by both poets, and of the generally genial mood of the two during that period as evidenced in their letters and notebooks, it would not be too ludicrous to detect an initially comic impulse behind *The Ancient Mariner* and *Peter Bell*, both of which were begun shortly after the visit of John Thelwall, and were read to William Hazlitt and others during the period when they lived at Alfoxden in 1797-98. If anything, these two poems are certainly more closely related to the ballad form which was then popular than some of the other *Lyrical Ballads* seem to be. Given also that their initial impulse also included writing something that would sell, their marketing instincts would have drawn them naturally to the ballad form. Coleridge seems to have had little doubt that his ballad might earn him five pounds rather quickly if he could get it into print.

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<sup>57</sup> Newlyn, (1986), 14.

As the Cornell editors point out, both poets found fascination ‘in the casting of a curse’ at the time of writing the poems, as evidenced in ‘The Ancient Mariner’, ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’, and ‘The Wanderings of Cain’.<sup>58</sup> The Shakespeare play most obviously connected with a curse is *Macbeth*. Its own opening scenes connect the witches’ curse not only with Macbeth himself but with an anonymous and, more pointedly, apparently guiltless sailor. The connection between the witches’ curse and Coleridge’s *Fire, Famine and Slaughter*, published in *The Morning Post* of January 1798,<sup>59</sup> makes the political connotations of ‘The Ancient Mariner’ a complex combination of literary self allusion and perhaps a reworking, not so much of the pointedly satirical polemic of the earlier published poem, but of its source in the play, which may have entailed on Coleridge’s part a re-reading or re-assessment of the role of the supernatural in poetry.

For the moment I wish to consider Coleridge’s use of the witches’ curse in *Macbeth* in much the same way that Newlyn conjectures Wordsworth transformed an insignificant figure in Southey’s *Joan of Arc* into the main focus or dominant figure in a poem which concentrates on human suffering. The witches in *Macbeth* may curse the sailor but his ‘bark cannot be lost’, as Macbeth’s is to be, merely ‘tempest-tossed.’

First Witch. Where hast thou been, sister?

Second Witch. Killing swine.

Third Witch. Sister, where thou?

First Witch. A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap

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<sup>58</sup> LB. Butler and Green, 12.

<sup>59</sup> See John Barrell, “Fire, Famine, and Slaughter,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.3 (2000). Barrell’s essay examines the political context in which the imagination became the central issue in matters of treasonous or seditious activity, particularly during the Treason Trials of 1794 and earlier. He also examines Coleridge’s claims for the role played by the reader’s active attention to the imagery in the suppressing of the ‘merely passive in our nature’ in his 1817 preface to the poem. In the preface Coleridge refers to Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* to illustrate his defence that he had not intended any actual violence to Pitt, the supposed object of the poem’s satire.

And mounch'd, and mounch'd, and mounch'd:

'Give me,' quoth I:

'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronyon cries.

Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' th' Tiger;

But in a sieve I'll thither sail

And, like a rat without a tail,

I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

Second Witch. I'll give thee a wind.

First Witch. Th'art kind.

Third Witch. And I another.

First Witch. I myself have all the other;

And the very ports they blow,

All the quarters that they know

I' th' shipman's card.

I'll drain him dry as hay:

Sleep shall neither night nor day

Hang upon his penthouse lid;

He shall live a man forbid;

Weary sev'nights, nine times nine,

Shall he dwindle, peak and pine.

Though his bark cannot be lost,

Yet it shall be tempest-tossed...

...Here I have a pilot's thumb,

Wrack'd as homeward he did come. (*Mac* I iii 1-45)<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Coleridge alludes to the curse in the line 'Off wandering mother, peak and pine!' in *Christabel* which was written in 1797. The conflation of Christ and Abel in the name of the poem's heroine is a

The narrative transformation of the cursed and anonymous sailor from an off-stage bit part in a tragic drama to the garrulous Mariner of the ballad, similarly to that of Margaret in *The Ruined Cottage*, makes him the hero or rather the anti-hero of the piece.<sup>61</sup> These parts are often non-speaking parts in their original place, they 'hold a silent station.'<sup>62</sup> In each of the poems as written, though, these characters are not so much actors as passive victims of powers which they perceive as being beyond their control. According to Wordsworth in the 1800 Preface one defect of the mariner is that he suffers rather than acts.<sup>63</sup>

The poem of my friend has indeed great defects; first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession as mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the control of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural: secondly that he does not act, but is continually acted upon: thirdly, that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat laboriously accumulated. Yet the Poem contains many delicate touches of passion, and indeed the passion is everywhere true to nature; a great number of the stanzas

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fairly obvious indication that a major theme or 'idea' of the poem would be guilt, self-sacrifice perhaps, and some form of redemption through suffering. A recent article suggests that the name may be linked with the tolling of the bells, echoed in Christabel's name and a constant reminder of her mother's death to Sir Leoline. Christabel would be an apt name for the child which would link her to Christ bells, as they were sometimes called. See Debra Channick, "'A Logic of Its Own': Repetition in Coleridge's 'Christabel'," *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* (2008), vol. 50. <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018144ar> Accessed 06.01.2009.

<sup>61</sup> M. M. Mahood's examination of the very important dramatic function of Shakespeare's often least noticed characters argues that they are often 'integral to a play's architectural form.' M. M. Mahood, *Bit Parts in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 84.

<sup>62</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XII 52.

<sup>63</sup> 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge realised quite early that necessarianism left no room for the will. 'By having no will but the will of Heaven, we call in omnipotence to fight our battles!' *CN* I 22.' Perry, (2001), 82. The exclamation mark, typically, emphasises Coleridge's triumphant counter to this aspect of necessarianism.

present beautiful images, and are expressed with unusual felicity of language.<sup>64</sup>

He not only appears to be unable to act himself, but is the cause of inaction in his audience. As the wedding guest discovers, the 'mariner hath his will', and the force of the mariner's voice and narrative, especially his glittering eyes, simply overpowers him and he himself is unable to act freely at all. (Interestingly these sailors, like the accomplished bit-part sailors in *The Tempest*, should have it in their power to act, not only when wind or tide favours them).<sup>65</sup> The tale is one which is seemingly contagiously paralyzing in its effects. The passiveness, which is implied in Hartleyan and mechanical theories of the mind, simply leaves no place for the will or moral choice.<sup>66</sup> The connection, therefore, between what Coleridge says is the passion quelling power of attending to imagery 'laboriously accumulated' and political activity or its suppression, would seem to parallel both Hartleyan theories of association which accounted for all the mind's activities, and that kind of philosophy which is too actively engaged in abstract speculation for the body and its needs or

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<sup>64</sup> Note to *The Ancient Mariner*. LB, Butler and Green, 791. 1800 edition of the poems only. See also William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, Longman Annotated Texts, ed. Michael Mason (London; New York: Longman, 1992), 9.

<sup>65</sup> Is Wordsworth thinking of the distinction in *The Tempest* between those characters whose occupation identifies their skills and capacities to act, rather than those who merely speculate, or become locked in imaginative fears or other distractions which prevent them from acting? One could say that Prospero is a ruler who has been literally 'spellbound.' See the opening scenes of the play in which the sailor's skills save the ship's passengers from drowning. Although Prospero's spells account for the behaviour of some characters, Ariel's presence (Coleridge's 'Reason') appears to be the saving principle. See Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 5. *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*. II 363.

<sup>66</sup> Wordsworth relates in a manuscript fragment intended for but not included in *The Prelude*, that at one time he actually believed that concepts such as the will, the accidents of thoughts and images which float across our minds, were 'lapses' or falls from the primal unity which is the life of all, 'in which all things live with God, themselves are God.' (The 'One Life' theory of Coleridge would appear to sanction this but Coleridge's 'in God we live and have our being' does not equate God and his creation.) This is an extremely obscure point and the grammar does not quite allow us to understand whether this 'was' the case or is: 'Such consciousness I deem but accidents.' This is a denial of the primacy of the intellect in favour of what can only have been, at that time, the sensations of the heart. If they are necessary accidents then the will is still a necessary will in order that we may choose freely. If we were to make 'deem' a mistaken transcript for 'deemed' then this would be a position held for a time but no longer.

desires to be given any, or if any, too little 'attention.' This splits the unity of the person into a divided body and soul.

The importance of the body to Wordsworth in his early work, recognised by Julie Carlson as a dominant feature of *The Borderers* above (see introduction), is presented by Cara Norris as an expression of his concern about, and a staging of, the consequences for the administration of justice of the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1794. This act had the effect of allowing trial by circumstantial evidence to convict suspects like Thelwall of treason in their absence, and without the benefit of being able to answer charges brought against them. Only trial by jury allowed suspects some reliance on the reason of their peers. Cara Norris explores this context as presented in *The Borderers*, and particularly the play's staging of these issues in River's claim that there is only one law: '...the only law that wisdom/ Can ever recognise: the immediate law/Flashed from the light of circumstances/ Upon an independent intellect.' (III v 30-33). Norris quotes Thomas May Erskine's account of the effect of the suspension of the act in his *Constitutional History of England*, (1861), as 'Spies and treacherous accomplices, however circumstantial in their narratives to secretaries of state and law officers, shrank from the witness-box...' (199), and argues that Wordsworth's play, foregrounding the lack of a body, and circumstantial evidence, particularly in the story of the woman who supposedly circles a grave every night,

stages in movement the dynamic the play generally represents through substitutions of periphrastic narratives that surround the subject in the absence of a direct, public accusation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cara Norris, "The Suspension of Habeas Corpus and Narrative Proliferation in Wordsworth's *The Borderers*." *European Romantic Review* 17.2 (2006). 197-203, 202.



Rivers' claim that this absent woman actually does all this is based purely on hearsay, and is similar to the tales and rumours told of Martha Ray in 'The Thorn'. The woman has not spoken to anybody in ten years, and the track she paces – '...they say it is knee deep.' The imagined space is filled by our own fancies with an imagined body.

The split between mind and body is staged, however, many times in 'The Ancient Mariner', written after Wordsworth's play, in the varying forms which the 'death' of the crew takes. One moment they are lifeless lumps, then spirit forms, then mechanical automatons, then an angelic choir, and finally they simply disappear or vanish. The journey the mariner takes is a journey which may play out the varieties of speculative ideas on the nature of the soul, and on the relation of the will and the soul to the body. The journey seems to allow so many different ideas to be staged that we can be as confused as the mariner as to what it all means. Perhaps that is the whole point. The nature of 'the curse' in 'The Ancient Mariner', however, is just as confusedly staged. The curse which unites the witches, Cain, and the mariner's guilt, is an aspect of the Biblical tradition which emphasises the God of the Old Testament's justice, which is an imagined 'natural' justice by which Cain is cursed by the earth:

The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from  
the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth,  
which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's  
blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it  
shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a  
fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the  
earth.(Gen.4.10-13)

The curse of Cain is that he curses himself, and he condemns his descendants repeatedly to the same fate through taking vengeance on themselves, despite God's decree that vengeance is his. Lamach cries to his wives: 'If Cain shall be avenged

seven times, Lamach shall be avenged seventy and sevenfold.’(Gen. 4.24-25). The cycle of vengeance is the mark of Cain, even if it is a warning against revenge. This paradox is not to be resolved until the incarnation of Christ when self sacrifice becomes the mark of the Christian, descendant and ‘follower’ of Christ, who ought to be the guide and guardian of a new relationship—that of man fallen into nature, but able to redeem himself through nature and reason.<sup>68</sup>

The mariner’s failure to recognize his responsibility for the death of the albatross, however, means that he naturally has no more idea than the superstitious crew as to *why* he should be apparently cursed in such an arbitrary manner, but he does think he is cursed even after the curse has been supposedly lifted when he has done penance enough. The religious universe he inhabits once he has crossed the line a second time, and the ‘images’ he perceives, as Seamus Perry points out, seem to be ‘informed’ by Catholicism, something both Coleridge and Wordsworth were very much opposed to, as a religion of superstition, the enemy of independent thinking, and an obstacle to the development of a liberal and tolerant state.<sup>69</sup>

The mariner is also, of course, a character in a wonderful poem of ‘pure imagination,’ as Coleridge was later to insist. But Coleridge also compared the poem to the tale of the genie and the Arab, who threw a date stone in a well in the *1001 Arabian Nights*. Like the mariner in *Macbeth*, he has not done anything he has

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<sup>68</sup> The theological aspects of the poem are discussed, and contested, by various critics, most famously by Robert Penn Warren, “A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading (1945-46),” in Robert Penn Warren, *Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1958) 195-305. As a rejoinder to Warren’s essay see Homer Obed Brown, “The Art of Theology and the Theology of Art: Robert Penn Warren’s Reading of Coleridge’s the Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” *boundary 2* 8.1 Autumn (1979). Brown questions Warren’s reliance on over-determining the symbolism of the poem to ‘redeem the universe for love and wisdom.’ 259 n 13.

<sup>69</sup> Perry, (1999), 286. In a letter to his friend William Mathews, who had recently returned from Portugal, Wordsworth asks him whether the Portuguese were as illiberal and superstitious as believed, and whether ‘the principles of free government have any advocates there...?’ *EY*. 113. These charges were laid against Catholic Portugal in Godwin’s *Political Justice*. See Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 176-77.

determined or consciously *willed* himself, to deserve to be so unconditionally cursed.<sup>70</sup> In terms of Shakespeare's play from which he has been 'lifted', he lives in a world of pure imagination in which only the slightest touches of palpable, sensuous, reality emerge occasionally.

### 3 Bottom and the Imagination.

To return to Coleridge's other insistence that *Lyrical Ballads* as a whole did have an internal unity of conception of the kind I have been discussing, and which was written of in the letter prior to any advertisement being written by Wordsworth, I would suggest that the main unifying principle is the imagination. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which consciously *stages* imagination would naturally come to mind, if it was not already a source for many of Coleridge and Wordsworth's ideas on the imagination. If the same strategy of transformation or translation could be used by Wordsworth and Coleridge using that play, what more likely character to transform or 'translate'<sup>71</sup> than Bottom, that already 'translated' rustic tradesman with little imagination, but enough wit to get his friend to transform his own dream, Shakespeare's comic drama, into a ballad?

I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this  
dream. It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it  
hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a  
play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the  
more gracious, I shall sing it at her death. (IV ii.214-21)

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<sup>70</sup> See Coleridge's comment on the 'intrusion' of the moral in *BL* I 272-3. For differing critical approaches which focus respectively on the perceptual state of the mariner, and on the poem as a Coleridgean rhetorical tour de force which leaves the reader as stunned as the wedding guest, see Edward E Bostetter, "The Nightmare World of the Ancient Mariner," *Studies in Romanticism* 1 (1962). and Frances Ferguson, "Coleridge and the Deluded Reader: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"," *Georgia Review* 31 (1987). For an overview of critical responses to *Lyrical Ballads* in general see Patrick Campbell, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads: Critical Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991).

<sup>71</sup> 'Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated.' (*MND* III ii 114.)

Peter Bell the potter, is not so far removed from Nick Bottom the weaver, and he too will not tell his own tale, occasioned by wandering off the tracks into the woods. His narrator will have a similarly disruptive audience to that which Bottom has when he performs in front of the Duke. Bottom too is perhaps the original of that type, that 'ideal' personage of a fool or an ass, who refuses to be quite the fool he is made out to be, and who resists translation into a metaphor, as Schlegel has it,<sup>72</sup> with all the palpable grossness and good humour which characterizes the palpable gross play which the mechanicals produce and perform in. It is the untranslatable-ness of characters like Bottom into mere idea or as, Schlegel has it, a metaphor, which Coleridge recognized and delighted in when in describing the Irish Bull, almost as if he were describing the role of Bully Bottom in that *almost* totally idealized and unitary of poetic dramas *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Coleridge writes that bulls occur:

where the Logic of the mere understanding is allowed to bring the entia of the supersensual world to its Procrustes Bed (Notebooks, IV; 4679). "I was a fine child but they changed me", for instance, happily confuses the permanent noumenal self with the transient phenomenal self. (*Biographia* I:72n.; and see letters, IV: 850).<sup>73</sup>

This refusal to allow idealism's power to totally usurp the contingent and accidental is where Perry locates both the source of the division between Wordsworth and Coleridge, and their potential unity. It is a much more fruitful source of their initial

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<sup>72</sup> 'The droll wonder of Bottom's transformation is merely the translation of a metaphor in its literal sense...' Quoted in Judith M. Kennedy and Richard F. Kennedy, eds., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London: Athlone, 1999). 82.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). 274-75. Perry argues that the division in Coleridge's thought, in which he veers between idealism and the claims of realism, constitutes a kind of muddle which is typical of Coleridge's philosophical and literary career in general. I discuss this further in chapter seven on *Biographia Literaria*.

and continued unity than I believe Perry may have sensed, and so humorously writes of.

What I hope to show is that the unifying ideas behind some of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 may have partly had their genesis in an initially comic play in which the dismissals of a skeptical philosophy are to a great extent brought down to earth by that character who sees no more in the fairies of the romantic imagination than simple cobwebs and peas blossoms, with at first glance, perhaps, no more than a utilitarian but none the less necessary and practical value. But he actually ‘converses’ with them in his dream, as he returns to a child-like simplicity and innocence. I will consider this further in chapter four when I look at *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in more detail, but for the moment the comic potentialities of Coleridge’s bull, his definition of the changeling I would call it, deserves some more attention.

Perry’s understanding of the value of the idea of the Bull to a reading of Wordsworth’s poetry does of course rest precisely on his understanding of an ‘idea’ and not of the physical entity, the bull, the animal which lies at the heart of the maze which Daedalus so carefully constructed and Theseus entered in order to kill. He cannot actually be killed, however, if he is an integral part of that nature which is also human nature, only suppressed or controlled, or perhaps transformed into a beast of burden. The ‘mythological’ Minotaur causing all the trouble for the young people of Athens is the beast to which they were annually sacrificed. The giving up of sons and daughters in marriage to a monster is the myth of regeneration which demands sacrifice, and which Theseus’ rational laws codified. Bully Bottom the weaver, the gross monster with the head of an ass and the body of a man, is the clue which leads us into and out of the maze. That maze could be equated with pure mind or metaphysical speculation, a dream state, the aesthetic world of myth or the

superstition of folk lore and ‘natural’ religion, but it is also a wood of possibly deranged perception. Bottom’s dream is a return to an unfathomable nature which takes him to the verge of a lechery which he politely disdains at the hands of Titania. His waking up, however, leads us back into the world of solid and substantial things which Perry rightly glimpses, for example, in the ‘silly buckets on the deck’ of *The Ancient Mariner*.<sup>74</sup> This refreshing clarity in the ballad is also redolent of a night in the woods:

A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune. (367-72)

Bottom however is such a literal minded man, that he hardly knows what to make of his encounter with Titania in the woods. His attempts at bringing the ‘spiritual’ experience he has had down to the level of his own understanding refers him to the obscurity of St Paul’s epistle to the Corinthian’s, and he ponders what that might mean as he confuses the sense of the words. He is not, however, unaware that Peter Quince might make something of it that he is unable to. He will get the more polished poet of the troupe to write it as a ballad.

The theory which seems to underlie Bottom’s planned transformation of his dream, is that the matter of his dream can be told in a variety of manners without the loss of deeper meaning. The form of translation which Bottom himself undergoes as he is made an ass by Puck is differently interpreted by all who actually see him, he is perceived as a monster by his companions, but he is also, as Coleridge sees him, the Adonis to Titania’s Venus.

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<sup>74</sup> Perry, (1999) 291.

The Fairy Queen and Bottom = Venus and Adonis.<sup>75</sup>

Whether transformation of elements of a play into a ballad, as a *method*, can perform this feat or not is the experiment that Wordsworth seems to have undertaken when he set out to write *Lyrical Ballads*. The deeper meaning though would have to be, as Theseus insists, a matter of the spectator or reader going beyond the capabilities of Bottom in order that imagination might amend the mistakes or limitations of the mere understanding.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare deftly manages to bind together 'opposites' from many different spheres, as David Young has shown in *Something of Great Constancy*.<sup>76</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge not only find 'a tale' to tell, but a fully formed model of imagination, the polar philosophy of Bruno partly staged, and lyric poetry in which every style seems to find a voice, which will serve them both in theory as well as practice.<sup>77</sup> Shakespeare not only manages to weave his characters and themes seamlessly together, he stages both the supernatural and the natural world, verse and prose, the language of ordinary men and the most exquisite poetry, placed not so much in juxtaposition, as arising from the one source of a 'mighty mind' like Shakespeare's, influenced by the tributary streams of poets such as Chaucer, Spenser, Ovid, and his translator Golding. This is the kind of mighty mind that Wordsworth hoped at the beginning of his career his might become, 'a power like one of Nature's,' and expressed at the end of *The Prelude* in 1805 as a still achievable dream.

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<sup>75</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 6 vols. (London: Routledge, 1957). 4115. This edition subsequently referred to as *CN*.

<sup>76</sup> David P. Young, *Something of Great Constancy: The Art of A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Yale Studies in English. Vol.164. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

<sup>77</sup> Shakespeare is thought to have used Golding's translation extensively in the play. For Raphael Lyne Ovid's English translators 'imitate the classics but they serve their native tongue while doing so.' Raphael Lyne, *Ovid's Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses, 1567-1632* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For Shakespeare's use of Chaucer the most useful work is Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins*, Liverpool English Texts and Studies. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978). *The Knight's Tale* is the immediate source of the play's plot. One short article relates Bottom's dream and his plan to write a ballad on it to a similar device in *The Book of The Duchess*. David G. Hale, "Bottom's Dream and Chaucer," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.2 (1985).

What Wordsworth and Coleridge often seem to be engaged in is an evasion of their possible debt to this play, or at least they do not fully acknowledge it as a source of illumination for their own theories about poetry and the imagination. The prefaces and letters almost seem to avoid the use of the word imagination altogether, choosing rather phrases like ‘the power’, ‘the faculty,’ ‘association’ or ‘the mind in a state of excitement.’ Not until the 1815 Preface and after long pages of explanation on the ‘power’ which determines nearly all of our relationships does Wordsworth state clearly that he has all along been writing of the imagination and its role in our lives.<sup>78</sup>

To return to the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads* and Coleridge’s claim that they exhibit a unity of purpose, and that each of the poems is to be read like a stanza in an Ode, Coleridge’s later description of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an example of the dramatised lyrical, and his more well known comment that he thought Shakespeare conceived of the play as a dream throughout, may give us some notion of the kind of aesthetic unity which Coleridge had in mind.

I am convinced that Shakespeare availed himself of the title of this play in his own mind, and worked upon it as a dream throughout...

Interfusion of the lyrical — that which in its very essence is poetical — not only with the dramatic, as in the plays of Metastasio,...but also in and through the dramatic. Songs in Shakespeare are introduced as songs only...beautifully as some of them are characteristic of the person who has sung or called for them, Desdemona’s ‘Willow,’ and Ophelia’s wild snatches,

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<sup>78</sup> ‘I shall spare myself and the Reader consideration of the Imagination as it deals with thoughts and sentiments, as it regulates the composition of characters, and determines the course of actions.’ Preface to the edition of 1815. William Wordsworth, Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest De Selincourt, Wordsworth Poetical Works with Introductions and Notes, New ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 755. Wordsworth deals mainly with the imagination as an element of poetic composition in the form of imagery in this Preface.



and the sweet Carollings in *As You Like It* But the whole of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* is one continued specimen of the dramatised lyrical.<sup>79</sup>

The play utilises such a variety of poetic styles and forms, from the heights of the most delicate and musical lyricism to the depths of 'the common language of men' like the rustics, that it would seem that what is presented is heterogeneously thrown together with no possibility of a unifying principle behind them. Not until 1818 and the *Treatise On Method*, however, does Coleridge allude to Theseus' most famous lines in order to illustrate the principle of the unifying conception or idea which lies behind the play. Even here, he evades using the word imagination. It is almost as if simply by writing the word in conjunction with Shakespeare's Theseus he will have said too much, but Coleridge also wishes to unite Plato's forms with imagination. In the section of the treatise dealing with the laws of chemistry, Coleridge brings in Theseus:

Such, too, is the case with the substances of the LABORATORY, which are assumed incapable of decomposition. They are mere exponents of some one law, which the chemical philosopher, whatever may be his theory, is incessantly labouring to discover. The law, indeed, has not yet assumed the form of an idea in his mind; it is what we have called an instinct; it is a pursuit after unity of principle through a diversity of forms. Thus as 'the lunatic, the lover, and the poet,' suggest each other to Shakespeare's Theseus, as soon as his thoughts present him the ONE FORM, of which they are but varieties; so water so flame, the diamond, the

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<sup>79</sup> Both quoted in Kennedy and Kennedy, 108-09. From various sources but mainly from Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Middleton Raysor, *Shakespearean Criticism* (London, 1930), 1, 66, 89, 105. These notes and marginalia have since been edited and published by Bollingen in the *Collected Coleridge*. 'The final phrase of the first passage in the British Library manuscript is written as 'lyrical dramatised,' and of the second 'a diamond speckless.' Kennedy and Kennedy, Notes, 397.

charcoal, and the mantling champagne, with its ebullient sparkles are convoked and fraternised by the theory of chemistry, and the secret of almost universal interest by its discoveries.<sup>80</sup>

The 'ONE FORM' of which Theseus's varieties are illustrations is the human imagination at work in the play and staged by Shakespeare. Continuing, Coleridge writes that the same 'principle of connection given by the mind, and sanctioned by the correspondency of nature' is the result of a 'profound yet observant meditation' on the part of the greatest poets and the greatest scientists.<sup>81</sup> The combination of meditation and observation is the conjunction of the 'ideal,' the 'forms' or, as Coleridge said the word should have been translated, the 'moulds' of imagination, and the accidents or particularities of history. Such a conjunction is made possible, in the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, by their supple and original response to Shakespeare.

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<sup>80</sup> Coleridge, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol.11. Shorter Works and Fragments. 1, 648.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 1, 648.

## Chapter 2 Translation as Practical Activity

### 1. Shakespeare, Passion, and Tytler.

Wordsworth and Coleridge first began to consider translation as a source of income in the months leading up to the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. There is some evidence from a letter to Cottle that Coleridge had earlier begun translating Wieland's *Oberon*,<sup>82</sup> none that he intended this as a source of income, but he does say that he was learning French and German at the time. In the same letter to Cottle which tells him about translating *Oberon* he also lets him know that he has sent his Nehemiah Higginbottom sonnets to *The Monthly Magazine*. In the process of translating from Wieland, the German translator of Shakespeare, himself inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Coleridge, in the character of the parodist or burlesque poet, who has all the characteristics of Bottom, appears in print more or less at the same time as Wordsworth and he began their collaboration on *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge's own ballad of *The Ancient Mariner* was already three hundred lines long at that point, as the same letter relates, but the coincidence of the three things related in the letter is quite pointed.<sup>83</sup>

The poets show an implicit sense in their writing that Shakespeare's idiom allows access to a language of passion or to express a combination of 'the grand and simple' affections. The relationship of their each seeking to 'emulate' this Shakespearean idiom to the next, and most important, stage of their literary lives, can be illuminated by focussing on what they planned to take up next - translation work.

The rejection of their plays, as well as the consequences of their own hospitality to the radical orator John Thelwall, later to lecture on Shakespeare himself

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<sup>82</sup> To Joseph Cottle. *CL* I 356.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 357.

at the same time as Coleridge,<sup>84</sup> and of Wordsworth's having to quit Alfoxden,<sup>85</sup> forced them to consider translating from German in order to benefit from the fact that copyright did not extend to translated works. Wordsworth's and Dorothy's letters of March 1798 suggest that the main reason for travelling to Germany with Coleridge, and with his family as first planned, was in order to study natural science, and to learn the language well enough to earn a profit from this most unoriginal form of writing.

We have come to a resolution, Coleridge, Mrs.  
Coleridge, my Sister and myself, of going into  
Germany, where we purpose to pass the two ensuing  
years in order to acquire the German language.<sup>86</sup>

Our present plan is to go into Germany for a couple of  
years. William thinks it will be a great advantage to him  
to be acquainted with the German language; besides that  
translation is the most profitable of all works.<sup>87</sup>

The possibilities offered by translation could be measured by the success of English translations of continental literature, including plays by contemporary German playwrights who had themselves imitated Shakespeare, especially Schiller, following the translation of Shakespeare into German. The most successful of these

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<sup>84</sup> Thelwall's lectures were given in 1811-12. His use of Shakespearean allusion in his speeches, in his dramatic writing, particularly *The Fairy of the Lake*, and his lectures was part of a general political exploitation of Shakespeare, especially in caricature and painting. See Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>85</sup> Wordsworth was refused a renewal of the lease of Alfoxden after Thelwall's visit in August 1797 caused some consternation in the area, including the sending down of a London based government agent to spy on the tenants and Coleridge. This was actually independent of Thelwall's visit but Coleridge and Wordsworth were not likely to have known that. Coleridge made some attempt to find accommodation for Thelwall after plans to offer him a cottage on Poole's estate fell through, and there is some suggestion that Thelwall was to stay at Alfoxden, but eventually he settled in Lyswen in Wales, near to the source of the Wye. Before leaving for Germany, all three visited Thelwall at Lyswen. See Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*. for a detailed account of the background to the government sending of an agent to spy on the poets. See also Nicholas Roe, "Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey," *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, eds. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). 60-80.

<sup>86</sup> Wordsworth to James Losh. *EY* 213.

<sup>87</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth to Mary Hutchinson. *EY* 216.

was the 1792 translation of Schiller's *Die Räuber* by the Scottish jurist and academic Alexander Frazer Tytler. *The Robbers* was the translation that Coleridge read as early as 1794,<sup>88</sup> and he uses that to form a link between Wordsworth, Schiller, and Shakespeare which extols those 'touches of the human heart'<sup>89</sup> which he found exemplified in each of them. *The Borderers* is itself testimony to Schiller's influence, and though he was later to regret that influence, this translation would probably have been his first encounter with Tytler's writing. One could say, therefore, that one of Wordsworth's first major works was a product of the translation principles of Alexander Tytler.<sup>90</sup>

Tytler's reason for writing *An Essay on the Principles of Translation* is given in his introduction as being in order to counteract the influence of so many poor translations, which were then flooding the market:

Whilst such has been our ignorance of the principles of this art, it is not at all wonderful, that amidst the numberless translations of the ancients and moderns, there should be so few that are possessed of real merit. The utility of translations is universally felt, and therefore there is continual demand for them. But this very circumstance has thrown the practice of translation into mean and mercenary hands.<sup>91</sup>

Though he was to become a successful translator himself through his work on *The Robbers*, Tytler has earned a more permanent status in literature as one of the earliest writers to produce a work wholly on translation, giving his papers on translation before the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1791 and publishing them

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<sup>88</sup> CL I 122. 'My God! Southey! Who is this Schiller? This Convulser of the Heart?...I should not like to be able to describe such characters.'

<sup>89</sup> CL I 325. To Joseph Cottle.

<sup>90</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *The Robbers: 1792, Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989).

<sup>91</sup> A. F. Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*. (London: Dent, 1907) 5.

anonymously in the essay in 1792, and in an extended and corrected version in 1797.

Tytler's earlier work on the life of Petrarch, which included translations of seven sonnets, was very popular, going into several editions and Wordsworth may have read this during the period when he was learning Italian at Cambridge. As the *Essay on the Principles of Translation* was the only full-length book on translation available at the time it is possible that a fairly inexperienced and, relatively to her brother, uneducated writer like Dorothy Wordsworth, would have found it a useful aid.

Tytler opens his book with a summary of the two main schools of thought on the rules of translation as he sees them. The first espouses that 'it is the duty of a translator to attend only to the sense and spirit of his original, to make himself perfectly master of his author's ideas, and to communicate them in those expressions which he judges to be best suited to convey them.' The second, that 'it is not only requisite that the ideas and sentiments of the original author should be conveyed, but likewise his style and manner of writing.' Tytler, finding these approaches contradictory, decides upon a method in which the 'point of perfection is found to be between the two.'<sup>92</sup>

I would therefore describe a good translation to be, *that in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work.*

Assuming this is a just description Tytler lays down three 'general laws of translation' which can be deduced from it:

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 5-9

I. That the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.

II That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.

III. That the translation should have all the ease of original composition.

Underneath each of these general laws of translation, are comprehended a variety of subordinate precepts, which I shall notice in their order, and which, as well as the general laws, I shall endeavour to prove, and to illustrate by examples.<sup>93</sup>

Tytler's confident assertion of the general laws of translation and his endeavour to prove them has all the breezy hauteur of the specialist in literature or the man of letters and learning, the philosophical critic, who would, as Coleridge attempts to do in *Biographia Literaria*, prove the distinction between imagination and fancy. Tytler's method is certainly not as seemingly immethodical as Coleridge's, and his examples, like Coleridge's, include both prose and poetry. However, the rules are broken almost as soon as read when it comes to the example of poetry, for that species of language gives a licence to the poet to do almost what he wishes with language.

## **2. Tytler, 'Exquisite Feelings', *Lyrical Ballads*.**

I hope to show, by examining some possible sources in Tytler's book of Wordsworth's unexpected, or particularly forceful, emphasis on the supposed difference between the language of prose and poetry in his advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*, that it is very possible that he had read Tytler's book either just before going to Germany or at an earlier date. For in Tytler we find the distinction between prose

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 9

and poetical language most forcefully expressed. Tytler chooses to illustrate the difference between the language of poetry and prose by comparing translations by various writers of, amongst other pieces, a poem by Tickel, 'The Ballad of Colin and Lucy', and Shakespeare's 'poetry' from the plays. Commenting on the kind of licence a translator may take with the 'ideas' of his original, Tytler states:

It will be allowed that in the following instance the translator, the elegant Vincent Bourne, has added a very beautiful idea, which, while it has a most natural connection with the original thought, greatly heightens its energy and tenderness. The two following stanzas are a part of the fine ballad of Colin and Lucy, by Tickel.

To-morrow in the church to wed.

Impatient both repair;

But know, fond maid, and know, false man,

That Lucy will be there.

There bear my corse, ye comrades, bear,

The bridegroom blithe to meet,

He in his wedding-trim so gay,

I in my winding sheet.

The translation is from English into Latin, and rather than give the actual translation in full I give Tytler's commentary on it:

In this translation, which is altogether excellent, it is evident, that there is one most beautiful idea superadded by Bourne, in the line *Qua semel, oh! &c.* which wonderfully improves upon the original thought. In the original, the speaker, deeply impressed with the sense of her wrongs, has no other idea than to overwhelm her



perjured lover with remorse at the moment of his approaching nuptials. In the translation, amidst this prevalent idea, the speaker all at once gives way to an involuntary burst of tenderness and affection. “Oh, let us meet once more, and for the last time!” *Semel, oh! Iterum congregiamer, ait.*— It was only a man of exquisite feelings, who was thus capable of improving on so fine an original.<sup>94</sup>

Tytler approves of the addition, but Wordsworth might have protested that the translator turns a ballad which portrays the feelings of the woman into one which sentimentalises her, by adding an expression of tenderness which becomes a wish for a final tryst. The unfaithful lover is almost forgiven, the male translator’s wishful thinking, perhaps, makes the woman’s suffering more bearable, and the tersely chilling character of the original is lost in the translation by the addition of the thought that this will be the ‘last time’ she will haunt his memory. The sentiment of the translator has despatched the ghost of the woman by adding his own ‘exquisite feelings,’ something which Wordsworth makes clear in his 1802 additions to the Preface of 1800 is not always acceptable:

However, exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a poet, it is obvious that, while he describes and imitates passions, his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps to let himself into an entire delusion, and even to confound and identify his own feelings with theirs, modifying only the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 23-24

language which is thus suggested to him, by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. Here, then, he will apply the principle on which I have so much insisted, namely, that of selection; on this he will depend for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion; he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature; and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.<sup>95</sup>

The reference to tricking out nature is particularly pointed here. In the example cited as an improvement by Tytler we are shown directly how the kind of ‘stylising’ Wordsworth refers to, is applied to improving what Tytler has already pointed out as a ‘fine ballad’. That this is more than permissible and denotes improvement for Tytler, might well have prompted Wordsworth to respond to this sanitizing of suffering by dramatising his own poems on betrayed women in the ballad form.

If we compare Wordsworth’s own ‘The Mad Mother’ or ‘Ruth’ with the above ballad there is no suggestion that the betrayed women are about to get over the misery of rejection. Neither, of course, do they intend literally to haunt the lover. However, Wordsworth’s ballad ‘Tis said that some have died for love’ does employ the kind of haunting which fancy produces in the bereaved lover whose ‘grievous pain’ distorts the ‘beauteous forms’ of nature. His grief finally expresses itself in admonishment to the ‘sweet rill’ to return to its source, ‘For thou dost haunt the air with sounds/ Which cannot be sustained.’ Wordsworth’s ‘hauntings’ are products of a mind oppressed by guilt or grief, or, as in the case of the narrator of ‘The Thorn’, a character ‘prone to

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<sup>95</sup> Preface, added in 1802, *LB*, Butler and Green, 751.

superstition.’ There are never actual ghosts, as in the ‘Ballad of Colin and Lucy’. This anti-Gothic, anti-supernatural strain in Wordsworth becomes part of his general campaign to purge contemporary literature of its sensationalist tendencies, and is part of the battle against superstition which informed both his and Coleridge’s religious and political principles.<sup>96</sup>

In the above preface Wordsworth writes as though he is speaking to an audience of general readers, but the following paragraph turns the focus onto those arbiters of ‘taste’ who might be called critics, and is expressed in a tone which becomes increasingly hostile and more pointedly directed to a narrower group of professionals. He himself takes critical pot-shots which sound as if they are aimed at more particular targets, and the language seems far too prickly to be merely the tone of a man defending his own poetry. He almost seems to be defending somebody else, acting as an advocate, and it is possible that he was defending the poetry of Burns. The legalese of the language generally, and the impassioned venom of his sarcasm is not what one would have expected from the writer of the original Advertisement, and is more aggressive than the terse statements of 1798.

My suggestion is that Wordsworth was familiar with Tytler’s book, and may have been provoked, not necessarily by Tytler personally, but by the generality of the Edinburgh critics and what they represented, into writing his 1799 poem ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ when he was actually in Germany, struggling to even learn the language, let alone translate it. Burns was for a time a protégé of Tytler’s father, Henry Tytler, and Tytler himself helped Burns to publish ‘Tam O’ Shanter’ and other poems. The

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<sup>96</sup> See James K. Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Chandler traces Wordsworth’s developing commitment to a Burkean ethic which emphasises the value of tradition as well as progress, relating these to Wordsworth’s valorisation of the natural, and the ‘second nature’ of human social relations.

venom against lawyers in Wordsworth's poem was pointed out by Lamb to Wordsworth in 1801, as satire which was out of place in the poem.<sup>97</sup>

It almost goes without saying that Wordsworth's reference to a 'translator, who deems himself justified when he substitutes excellences of an another kind' when he cannot produce language as 'exquisitely' fitted for the passion of real life, points to the real deficiency in Tytler's general rules of translation: his lack of any reference to passion at all.

But it may be said by those who do not object to the general spirit of these remarks that, as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper he should consider himself in the position of a translator, who deems himself justified when he substitutes excellences of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavours occasionally to surpass his original, in order to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels he must submit. But this would be to encourage idleness and unmanly despair. Further, it is the language of men who speak of what they do not understand; who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely about a *taste* for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontinac or Sherry.<sup>98</sup>

The 'rope-dancing' allusion suggests that Wordsworth's target may be a member of the legal profession, and with links to judicial powers.<sup>99</sup> Tytler was all of these, and

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<sup>97</sup> For details of this letter see below.

<sup>98</sup> Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* 1802. Butler and Green, 751.

<sup>99</sup> Rope dancing is slang for hanging.

had recently published a book on Courts Marshal, at which he sat regularly as Judge Advocate of Scotland, even though a deputy usually filled the actual post. He took his judicial duties very seriously. He was also raised to the Bench of the Court of Session in 1802 and took the title Lord Woodhouselee. He was the typical Edinburgh man of taste and refinement who combined academic, legal, and literary pursuits in the Scottish capital. He had inherited his father's and his mother's quite grand estates in 1792. Tytler was widely regarded as an amiable and hospitable man, whose guests were particularly well fed, and whose pursuits were all that could be expected of a successful lawyer and writer.<sup>100</sup>

Once he was living in Germany, Wordsworth bought Bürger's poetry in German as well as Percy's *Reliques*.<sup>101</sup> He was then able to compare the translations, though his knowledge of German was not yet sufficient to understand him, with the 'originals'. Mary Jacobus compares Bürger's ballads with Wordsworth's in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' (1798)*, drawing on Wordsworth's comments in a letter to Coleridge written in Germany, on the differences between Bürger and Burns, specifically on the lyricism of Bürger's poetry, which he none-the-less praises despite feeling that there are no 'characters' in Bürger, and on the greater evidence of character in Burns. Her analysis of the ballads of 1798 is particularly sensitive in relation to Wordsworth's rejection of the sensationalism in Bürger's *Des Pfarrers Tochter Von Taubenhein*, or *The Lass of Fair Wone*, as it became in Taylor's translation, in his own ballad *The Thorn*. What I would offer also, however, is that rather than concentrating on the suffering of the mother, by rejecting Bürger's 'disingenuous' Gothic piety, Wordsworth's poem focuses on the imagination

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<sup>100</sup> Alexander Du Toit, "Tytler, Alexander Frazer, Lord Woodhouselee (1747-1813)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/27965>. Accessed 23 Jan. 2009.

<sup>101</sup> *EY* 234.

of the narrator who, as Jacobus herself describes him is ‘the telescope- bearing retailer of local gossip and superstition.’<sup>102</sup>

Stephen Parrish describes *The Thorn* as a dramatic monologue and reads the poem as an example of ‘the workings of a superstitious imagination.’<sup>103</sup> The poem actually stages the consequences of superstition and of a socially sanctioned indulgence in the kind of sensationalism Wordsworth rejects, in the life of the community. The ballad which he chooses to transform or translate, though English or British in origin, is the creation of an incomer or sea captain, an ancient mariner of sorts, who at no time speaks to the woman herself, and whose whole story is based on rumour, and what he thought he saw and heard in a storm! Sturm and drang indeed.

Wordsworth saw the pollution of this originally ‘pure’ strain of English thought and sentiment at first hand, as soon as he had learned sufficient German to read Bürger’s poems in the original, and he refers to this in the 1815 Preface.<sup>104</sup> Tytler, then, could have been considered by Wordsworth as partaking in that general trade in ‘foreign goods’ which was creating what Wordsworth later saw as contributing to the loss of imaginative power in the reading public, at a time when writers like Walter Scott were enthusiastically taking on the translation of Bürger’s poetry. This was in 1796, the same year that Burns died. The loss of native imagination seemed to Wordsworth to be a betrayal of poets like Burns. This loss was

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<sup>102</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Jacobus’ later work on Wordsworth looks at his use of Shakespeare in *The Prelude*, and using a Freudian critical approach to the way he draws on *Macbeth*, she relates this to Wordsworth’s anxieties as an author, and his suppression or projection of feelings of guilt. Mary Jacobus, “Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference”: Essays on *The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>103</sup> Patrick Campbell, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads: Critical Perspectives*, 30-32.

<sup>104</sup> Wordsworth argues that most of Percy’s *Reliques*, especially those published under his own name, were themselves poor imitations which falsely embellished their original models. Referring to Johnson’s dismissal of Percy’s ballads, he also dismisses their German imitators: ‘That even Bürger... had not the fine sensibility of Percy, might be shown from many passages, in which he has deserted his original only to go astray.’ ‘Essay Supplementary to the Preface,’ 1815, (Oxford, 1965) 748.

apparently going unnoticed, having been replaced by an increase in the power of a passive fancy, or by imagery so minutely and unnaturally painted as to require no corresponding effort on the part of the reader to ‘see’ or feel anything for himself.

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literary and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.<sup>105</sup>

The infamous line ‘Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.’ is a simple example of the way that this man of little fancy, but some imagination describes the ‘muddy pond’ completely without embellishment of metaphor or any poetic colouring. We, as he no doubt does, are expected to fill this geometric ‘form’ of a rectangle with the ‘shape’ of a baby’s body. That is an active imagination as opposed to a passive fancy.

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<sup>105</sup> *LB Butler and Green*, 746.

### 3. Pope, Polished Poetry, and Chaste Prose

Wordsworth would have found much to agree with in Tytler's essay, but we can also find in it much more that may have aggravated him. The targets of Wordsworth's disdain are those poets who came after Shakespeare and Milton, and include, of course Pope. The praise Tytler gives to Pope's translations of Homer, particularly his embellishments of the original, though qualified by some mild criticism a few pages later, is directed at the same passage Wordsworth denigrates in the 'Essay Supplementary to the Preface' of 1815, and which Coleridge returns to in *Biographia Literaria*.<sup>106</sup> Tytler may well have stimulated Wordsworth and Coleridge's determination to bring about a reformation of public taste and morals in their avowed intention of writing poetry in the spirit of 'our elder poets' prior to the revolution, as stated in the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*. The revolution Wordsworth refers to is not simply the English revolution, but that which transformed popular taste in poetry brought about by translations such as Pope's Homer. Whereas Wordsworth and Coleridge derived deep imaginative nourishment from Shakespeare, Tytler, admires Pope's polished style:

It would be endless to point out all the instances in which Mr Pope has improved upon both the thought and expression of his original. We find frequently in Homer, amidst the most striking beauties, some circumstances introduced which diminish the merit of the thought or of the description. In such instances the good taste of the translator invariably covers the defect of the original, and often converts it into an additional beauty... But even the highest beauties of the original receive additional lustre from this admirable translator. A

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<sup>106</sup> *LB*, Butler and Green, 747.



striking example of this kind has been remarked by Mr. Melmoth. It is the translation of that picture in the end of the eighth book of the Iliad, which Eustathius esteemed the finest night-piece that could be found in poetry.<sup>107</sup>

Tytler then paraphrases from the original Greek lines he quotes, and it is in this paraphrase that we can detect elements of the descriptive lines which Wordsworth would later write in his own, unpublished, 'A Night Piece'.

"As when the resplendent moon appears in the serene canopy of the heavens, surrounded with beautiful stars, when every breath of air is hush'd, when the high watch-towers, the hills, and woods, are distinctly seen; when the sky appears to open to the night in all its boundless extent; and when the shepherd's heart is delighted within him." How nobly is this picture raised and improved by Mr. Pope!

As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night.  
O'er heav'ns clear azure spreads her sacred light:  
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,  
And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene;  
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,  
And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole:  
O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,  
And tip with silver every mountain's head:  
Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise,  
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies:  
The conscious swains rejoicing in the sight,

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<sup>107</sup> Tytler, 54.

Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.<sup>108</sup>

Wordsworth's poem below, manages to convey the simplicity of the original without the need for what Tytler calls the 'happy amplification and embellishment of his [Pope's] imagery'. In Wordsworth's poem we can see more or less directly how the 'language of prose' is no different to the language of poetry; particularly when it is Greek poetry translated into just and chaste English prose, and reformed into what Wordsworth would call unadulterated English poetry.<sup>109</sup>

The sky is overspread  
With a close veil of one continuous cloud  
All whitened by the moon, that just appears,  
A dim-seen orb, yet chequers not the ground  
With any shadow — plant, or tower, or tree.  
At last a pleasant instantaneous light  
Startles the musing man whose eyes are bent  
To earth. He looks around, the clouds are split  
Asunder, and above his head he views  
The clear moon and the glory of the heavens.  
There in a black-blue vault she sails along  
Followed by multitudes of stars, that small,  
And bright, and sharp along the gloomy vault

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<sup>108</sup> Tytler, 54.

<sup>109</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth's prose journal is also a 'source' for the poem and makes the piece a collaborative work of observation and translation. See Dorothy Wordsworth, Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth: The Alfoxden Journal, 1798; the Grasmere Journals, 1800-1803, Oxford Paperbacks, ed. Mary Trevelyan Moorman, New ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971). 2. The entry was written 25-27th January 1798. Dorothy's description echoes the description above in the 'blue vault of the heavens.' This 'Night Piece' is also the focus of a comparison with the Mount Snowdon episode from *The Prelude* by Jonathan Wordsworth in William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1982). The chapter is reprinted as 'The Image of a Mighty Mind: (1805, Book 13)' in Stephen Gill, ed., William Wordsworth's The Prelude: A Casebook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 225-58, 30.

Drive as she drives. How fast they wheel away!  
 Yet vanish not! The wind is in the trees;  
 But they are silent. Still they roll along  
 Immeasurably distant, and the vault  
 Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,  
 Still deepens its interminable depth.  
 At length the vision closes, and the mind  
 Not undisturbed by the deep joy it feels,  
 Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,  
 Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.<sup>110</sup>

Coleridge's comment on Pope's version in chapter II of *Biographia Literaria*, (though demoted to a very long footnote) makes the clear point that though he admires Pope's original work, especially his almost faultless position and choice of words in his satires and moral essays, it is his translation of Homer

...which I do not stand alone in regarding as the main source of our pseudo poetic diction. This by the way is an additional confirmation of a remark made, I believe, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, that next to the man who formed and elevated the taste of the public, he that corrupted it, is commonly the greatest genius.<sup>111</sup>

Coleridge hints that he is not alone in regarding this as the source of the gaudy poetic diction of the previous age. In the same note he recollects Wordsworth's conversation, when he urged Coleridge to re-examine with 'impartial strictness' Gray's celebrated Elegy only to discover similar examples of these 'defects' whereupon he 'felt almost as if I had been newly couched.' (Coleridge, of course, will

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<sup>110</sup> *LB*, Butler and Green, 276.

<sup>111</sup> *BL* I 41.

go on in Volume II to point out the defects of Wordsworth's poetry.) He states further, however, that while he may have lost an appreciation of what formerly gave him pleasure, he 'has been more than repaid...by the additional delight with which I read the remainder.'<sup>112</sup>

#### 4. The Language of Conversation

Tytler has much to say on the use of the language of conversation in translations that can stand favourable comparison with Wordsworth in his advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* 1798. On the use of idiomatic phrases Tytler comments that a translator should have no difficulty in finding parallels for the general idioms found in all languages, which he associates at first with grammatical usage or constructions such as the distinctive place of the adjective in English. But he also asserts that the translator will find it especially difficult to translate those expressions commonly found in conversation:

But it is not with regard to such idiomatic constructions that the translator ever finds himself in any difficulty. It is in the translation of those particular phrases of which every language has its own collection; phrases which are generally of a familiar nature, and which occur almost commonly in conversation, or in that species of writing which approaches to the ease of conversation.

As there is nothing which so much conduces both to the ease and spirit of a composition, as a happy use of idiomatic phrases, there is nothing which a

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<sup>112</sup> BL I 41.

translator, who has a moderate command of his own language, is so apt to carry to a licentious extreme.<sup>113</sup>

Tytler elsewhere extols the virtues of simplicity and purity of expression, but he makes it clear that the language of poetry is quite distinct from that of prose or conversation. As Tytler is proposing principles of translation for poetry and prose, he uses both as illustrations of his general rules, but he makes a marked distinction between what poets practice and what a just taste in prose may be:

The poets, in all languages, have a licence peculiar to themselves, of employing a mode of expression very remote from the diction of prose, and still more from that of ordinary speech. Under this licence, it is customary for them to use antiquated terms, to invent new ones, and to employ a glowing and rapturous phraseology, or what Cicero terms *Verba ardentia*. To do justice to these peculiarities in a translation, by adopting similar terms and phrases will be found extremely difficult; yet without such assimilation, the translation presents no just copy of the original. It would require no ordinary skill to transfuse into another language the thoughts of the following passages, in a similar species of phraseology:<sup>114</sup>

Tytler uses quotations from Shakespeare and Milton as examples of the three modes of expression which he claims are the essentials of this poetic licence. He illustrates ‘antiquated terms’ by a passage from *Hamlet* Act 1; ‘new terms’ from *Paradise Lost* Book 6 and *Antony and Cleopatra*; and ‘glowing phraseology’ from

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<sup>113</sup> Tytler, 137.

<sup>114</sup> Tytler, 177. Interestingly, Tytler omits the full line and its reference to the ‘wretch’ - the beadle or magistrate - who Lear indicts with hypocrisy. Being a lawyer himself, perhaps it was too close to home or too critical of his peers and principals.

Lear's speech below which utilises those 'houseless' heads, which Wordsworth uses himself in both *The Borderers* and *Tintern Abbey*.

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er ye are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,  
Your looped and window'd raggedness defend you  
From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en  
Too little care of this; Take physic, pomp!  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,  
And show the heavens more just.

SHAK. *K. Lear*

Tremble, thou wretch,  
Thou hast within thee undivulged crimes,  
Unwhipt of justice! Hide thee, thou bloody hand;  
Thou perjure, and thou similar of virtue.  
Thou art incestuous! Caitiff, shake to pieces,  
That tender covert and convenient seeming  
Hast practis'd on man's life! Close pent up guilts,  
Rive your concealing continents, and ask  
Those dreadful summoners grace.      *Ibid*<sup>115</sup>

Tytler then quotes a passage from Milton's *Comus* as another example of this glowing phraseology. In suggesting that the poet is licensed to use this kind of language as his peculiar prerogative, we can see where Wordsworth might have read

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<sup>115</sup> Tytler, 178.

of the so called distinctive language of poetry, in itself nothing new, but in a context in which he would have had a particular interest at the time, as he was contemplating translation as a source of income, and from a source with whom he had little sympathy at the time.

It is also worth quoting in full Tytler's assertion that the most difficult thing to imitate in a translation is simplicity of style:

There is nothing more difficult to imitate successfully in a translation than that species of composition which conveys just, simple, and natural thoughts, in plain , unaffected, and perfectly appropriate terms; and which rejects all those *aucupia sermonis*, those *lenocinia verborum*, which constitute what is properly called florid writing. It is much easier to imitate in a translation that kind of composition (provided it be at all intelligible), which is brilliant and rhetorical, which employs frequent antitheses, allusions, similes, metaphors, than it is to give a perfect copy of just, apposite, and natural sentiments, which are clothed in pure and simple language: For the former characters are strong and prominent, and therefore, easily caught; whereas the latter have no striking attractions, their merit eludes altogether the general observation, and is discernible only to the most just and chastened taste. It would be difficult to approach to the beautiful simplicity of expression of the following passage in any translation.<sup>116</sup>

He then gives a prose extract from Milton's *Tract on Education* which encourages the student to take frequent breaks from his studies by going out to partake of the pleasures of nature:

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<sup>116</sup> Tytler, 180.

In those vernal seasons of the year, when the air is calm  
and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against  
Nature, not to go out to see her riches, and partake in  
her rejoicing with heaven and earth.<sup>117</sup>

This is not unlike Wordsworth's exhortation in 'Lines: Written at a small distance from my house, and sent by my little boy to the person to whom they are addressed,' and the two complementary voices heard in 'Expostulation and Reply' and 'The Tables Turned.' The almost comic irony that Wordsworth may have actually been reading Tytler's book at the time he wrote the lines below, is that the words of the speaker in 'Expostulation and Reply': 'As if you were her first-born birth/And none had lived before you,' would be doubly ironic, as Milton's former expression of the same sentiment *is* from one who lived before him, rather than from a contemporary professor of modern morality.

Wordsworth claims in the 1800 Preface that Shakespeare and Milton are now no longer venerated as they should be, or are wilfully misread because the demand for the sensational and extravagant has driven the 'truths' which they convey into neglect. The Gothic sensationalism, which Tytler's translations have imported through Schiller, Wordsworth now saw as literally driving Shakespeare and Milton out of the market. However, by translating them anew into a language in which those truths might be readily 'felt,' as well as simply understood, Wordsworth believed that he could counteract those tendencies that modern literature and the uniformity of city life had produced which prevented people from actually thinking, feeling and seeing things for themselves. More importantly they prevented people from actually acting on those feelings in order to change what could be changed for the good. The savage torpor he resents is a failure to be actively engaged in the reform of abuses or the

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<sup>117</sup> Tytler, 180.



improvement of moral life. In this sense, he hoped that the independence of mind and opinion, which poets like Burns and Milton espoused, might actually be facilitated.

The fact that Wordsworth comments that *Expostulation and Reply* was addressed to a friend who was uncommonly attached to modern books of moral philosophy at the time, may even be directed not only at Hazlitt's espousal of Godwinian philosophy, as many critics have surmised, but towards those modern, Scottish, moral philosophers like Tytler and his associates.

Wordsworth *does* translate the prose piece into poetry using virtually the same language that Milton uses in the prose passage, and conveys those just 'sentiments' in the simplest of language in the more colloquial form of direct conversation. By employing idiomatic phrases such as '( 'tis a wish of mine)', 'Put down your book,' and 'Up! Up!' he defies Tytler's contention that poets have to use a language of their own distinct from prose.

But the 'wise passiveness' Wordsworth espouses as against the 'savage torpor' described in the 1800 Preface is also directed towards experiencing the natural world as it really is, not as it is conveyed by language of the kind used by Pope in the passage above. The kind of passiveness Wordsworth would encourage is itself presented in a double sense, so that books and nature together produce a poet who will 'grow double,' through a process whereby the world of the senses feeds and supports the reading mind, and provides restorative opportunities for refreshment that are really to be seen and heard, felt and experienced. This is not the case when the language of poetry is not allied to the senses, but with gaudy fictions such as Pope's 'thrones' and 'gilded poles'. That Wordsworth wished the two latter poems to be read as complementary, is given further support by his later inclusion of books as a source of

inspiration in *The Prelude*, and his sonnets of 1802, as well as his Prefaces of 1800 and 1802.

There is a blessing in the air,  
Which seems a sense of joy to yield  
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,  
And grass in the green field.  
My sister! ('tis a wish of mine)  
Now that our morning meal is done,  
Make haste, your morning task resign;  
Come forth and feel the sun,  
Edward will come with you; and pray,  
Put on with speed your woodland dress  
And bring no book: for this one day  
We'll give to idleness.

Tytler's categorisation of the above prose passage by Milton as 'just, apposite, and natural sentiments, which are clothed in pure and simple language;' though conventional, is not very distant from the words Wordsworth uses to describe the kind of poetry which he would attempt to write as an experiment in order to see whether it could become popular. He would not, though, have agreed with the concept of 'clothing' the thought or sentiments of poetry in language. Nine years later in his *Essays Upon Epitaphs* Wordsworth is more direct in his criticism of this manner of characterising the language of poetry or prose. In arguing that language ought to be an 'incarnation of the thought', he none-the-less sympathises with a mourner whose epitaph carved on his wife's grave is extravagant, and Wordsworth uses translation as the means by which it might be redeemed for nature.

Can anything go beyond this extravagance? Yet, if the fundamental thoughts be translated into a natural style, they will be found reasonable and affecting.<sup>118</sup>

Wordsworth's sympathy with the writer extends to his understanding that the 'fantastic images', as D. D. Devlin in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs* concurs, 'though they stain the writing, stained not his soul':

This simple hearted Man must have been betrayed by a common notion that what was natural in prose would be out of place in verse; — that it is not the Muse which puts on the Garb but the Garb which makes the Muse.<sup>119</sup>

Wordsworth's sense that the man has been betrayed by a 'common notion', betrayed by the muse of fancy almost, is qualified in the same essay by the possibility that in this context it may be harmless to the man's soul, but that in other circumstances language may act as a counter spirit which can falsify, making it the anti-type of the kind of chaste, maternal agency he uses to describe the 'power' of language that can be used 'to uphold, feed, and leave in quiet.' Wordsworth's anti-type, acts as a counter-spirit to the maternal, to the mother tongue perhaps, which leaves a changeling in the place of the child.<sup>120</sup> This is a very complex trope, in which it is suggested that fanciful language becomes capable of betraying the natural; dissolving the more substantial bonds of nature, here — simply natural reactions.

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in D. D. Devlin, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs* (London: Macmillan, 1980). 76.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>120</sup> See Frances Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Ferguson's approach differs from my own, in that I take Shakespeare as the basis of my discussion of Wordsworth's poetry, and would trace the use of Wordsworth's metaphor to his reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I see the role of the 'counter spirit' of imagination as used in the essay as related to the character of Puck. Puck represents a comic transformation of Mercury, the messenger or communicator, who waylays the other characters, but often makes mistakes, leads astray, or simply introduces confusion.

## **Chapter 3 ‘Imitating’ Shakespeare: Imagination’s Work of ‘Translation’**

### **1. Bottom the Weaver, Theseus on Imagination, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Michael’**

In a letter to his brother of March 1798, Coleridge wrote:

I devote myself to such works as encroach not on the antisocial passions — in poetry, to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life — in prose...to the seeking with patience...what our faculties are & what they are capable of becoming. I love fields and & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness- and because I have found benevolence and quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others — and to destroy the bad passions not by combating them, but by keeping them in inaction.

His hopes are that one good consequence of revolutions is that instead of expecting good to come totally from change of government, people will eventually see

the necessity of individual effort; that they will act as kind neighbours and good Christians, rather than as citizens and electors; and so by degrees will purge off that error, which to me appears as wild and more pernicious than the *παγχρυσούν* and panacaea of the old alchemists— the error of attributing to Governments a talismanic influence over our virtues and our happiness—as if governments were not rather effects than causes. It is true that all effects react and become

causes...but there are other agents which act more powerfully because by a nigher and more continuous agency, and it remains true that governments remain more the effect than the cause of that we are.<sup>121</sup>

Coleridge goes on to clarify these more powerful agents as the powers of the human mind, and the passions which cloud the understanding. The passions which are staged in *Lyrical Ballads* swing initially between admiration and condemnation of the killing of the albatross in 'The Ancient Mariner'. The changing fortunes of the vessel and crew at the hands of a nature perceived as outside of themselves and under the sway of the elements that govern their progress, are judged by the crew as the good or evil consequences of that killing, depending on whether the wind blows fair or foul. This is like the talismanic or superstitious belief which Coleridge suggests in the letter above, is the 'faith' held by the majority. Such a faith holds that governments and rulers are ultimately responsible for all of their subjects' misery or happiness, without those subjects considering their own actions as necessary contributors to it. We note that the mariner kills the bird in a state that is as 'unaware' as the state in which he blesses the water snakes ('I blessed them unaware' 285). The *spirit* of the gospel,' which Coleridge tells his brother is the 'sole cure' for the inherent depravity in society and individuals, does not operate in the poem in any sense at all, if that spirit is an active love. Although the moral of the poem may be recognised by the mariner, he does not act on it, he simply speaks of it. His waylaying the wedding guest and depriving him of that pleasure in the celebration of the wedding, which *is* 'nature' denies him access to that Joy which is the wedding feast. He simply goes to church to pray. He does not act - as Wordsworth so pointedly said in 1800, but is passive in the face of everything that happens to him. This is the same naive faith in the 'powers'

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<sup>121</sup> CL I 397.

that govern that Coleridge refers to above. The poem stages revolution but leaves the mariner where he set out from. He has suffered enormously, but is content to accept the reasons given for that suffering from whatever powers he unresistingly accepts. His influence on the wedding guest is, for the progress of the narrative, compelling and paralysing, but the auditor wakes wiser to the effects of the story the next day.

The passions aroused in the reader by this poem are effectively described by Charles Lamb in the letter to Wordsworth below. He refutes everything in Wordsworth's note to the poem, and regrets that Coleridge has renamed the poem 'A Poet's Reverie' in 1800.

It is as bad as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is not a lion, but only the scenical representation of a lion. What new idea is gained by this title but one subversive of all credit—which the tale should force upon us — of its truth.

For me, I was never so affected with any human tale. After first reading it, I was totally possessed with it for many days. I dislike all the miraculous part of it; but the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery dragged me along like Tom Piper's Magic Whistle...

Disagreeing with Wordsworth's claim that the mariner should have had more character as a sailor, he suggests that this is due to the horrors of his experiences being

like the state of a man in a bad dream, all consciousness of personality is gone.<sup>122</sup>

Lamb describes the effect of the tale and the mariner's appearance on the wedding guest as due to his having been conversant in 'supernatural events' that have produced 'a strange cast of *phrase*, eye, appearance etc., which frighten the wedding

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<sup>122</sup> Alfred Ainger, ed., Charles Lamb, New ed. (London: Macmillan, 1888). I 163-4.

guest.’ This is precisely the effect which Wordsworth tried to avoid in his poetry, and which has left neither readers nor critics ‘in quiet’ for the last two hundred years.

By 1800 Wordsworth would have us associate the ties that bind the state and its people, the law and individuals, and ideas of reason with the actual behaviour of men and women; with the coupling of tenderness and more austere virtues: the republican and protestant Miltonic imagination, rather than the richly and suggestively fanciful Shakespearean dress which Burke clothes his thoughts and passionate speeches in.<sup>123</sup> Writing back to Charles Lamb after Lamb had not seemed to appreciate the poems in the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800, Wordsworth tried to clarify the kind of imagination he sought to emulate by dissociating himself somewhat from Shakespeare’s imagination, and allying himself with Milton. Charles Lamb paraphrased what Wordsworth wrote as:

A deal of stuff about a certain union of Tenderness and Imagination, which in the sense that he used imagination was not the characteristic of Shakesp. but which Milton possessed in a degree far exceeding other Poets: which Union, as the highest species of poetry, and chiefly deserving that name, he was most proud to aspire to.<sup>124</sup>

Wordsworth went on to illustrate ‘said union’ by quoting the following lines from *Michael* and wrote that he considered the passage ‘as one of the Best I ever wrote.’

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<sup>123</sup> John Thelwall tried hard to emulate Burke. Even though he disparaged his ‘wild imagination,’ he respected his talents. His highly rhetorical language, like Burke’s, could be said to act as a counter spirit, ready to waylay the unwary, always extravagantly witty, peppered with Shakespearean allusions; yet liable to inflame others. See Thelwall’s ‘Sober Reflection on the Seditious and Inflammatory Letter of The Right Hon. Edmund Burke, To A Noble Lord.. Addressed to the Serious Consideration of his Fellow Citizens.’ In John Thelwall, *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Gregory Claeys (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). 328-387.

<sup>124</sup> Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, 3 vols. (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1975). I, 273.

...After thou  
First cam'st into the world, as it befalls  
To new born infants, thou didst sleep away  
Two days, and blessings from thy father's tongue  
Then fell upon thee. (349-53)

Wordsworth is responding here to Lamb's praise of *The Ancient Mariner* by marking its alliance with the 'imagination' of Shakespeare, which is most often linked with Theseus' speech from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the first volume the linking theme is the undifferentiated imagination of Theseus's lunatics, lovers and poets. Poems such as 'The Mad Mother,' 'The Ancient Mariner,' 'The Last of the Flock,' 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill,' even 'Lines Left upon a Seat in a yew Tree,' however, stage the effects of fancy or associationism in extreme conditions of despair or madness, or in an '[un]healthy state of association' of the kind Wordsworth did not expect of his ideal readers.<sup>125</sup> The 'manner in which we associate ideas 'in a state of excitement', as Wordsworth calls it in *The Preface* of 1800, in these particular poems is often, as is quite clear in the inscription, due to a character's 'fancy.'

And so, lost man!  
On visionary views would fancy feed,  
Till his eyes streamed with tears.

The inactivity of this recluse, unable to realise his visions in active life because his great talents have been neglected in public life, leads to a total withdrawal which is not what Coleridge or Wordsworth envisaged their own future lot to be. This poem may seem more political than most in that it deals with active public life, and

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<sup>125</sup> See *Preface*, 1800, (116), Butler and Green, 745.



the kind of 'benevolence' which Godwin's philosophy advocated. It may also point towards the kind of withdrawal which John Thelwall eventually made from public life, stung by the neglect of his own talents into sneering upon the efforts of others, despising those he formerly championed, and dwelling mainly on his own suffering, his 'eye ever on himself.'<sup>126</sup>

The shepherd in 'The Last of the Flock' at one point deems everyone he meets thought 'some evil' of him, and his tearful state may produce sympathy for him. Yet he has associated ideas of evil in others with his own evil thoughts, much as does the mad mother. His state of mind and the tears that manifest that state, is repeated in several poems which speak of the kind of torpor which Wordsworth denigrates in the Preface of 1800. It is almost as if fancy produces inaction, as Coleridge tries to suggest, in comparing the action of fancy with the role of the Gorgon's head as producing a kind of 'mirrorment,' which freezes the blood, as Harry Gill's is. It is similar to the state which the tale of the ancient mariner produces in his auditor.<sup>127</sup> This also links it with the fanciful image of 'the Night-mare Life-in-Death' which 'flecks man's blood with cold' in 'The Ancient Mariner', producing a fear which is deadening in its effects. (193-205) Johnny, the idiot boy in Wordsworth's poem, rather than being fearful of nature, becomes calm, filled with wonder, and open to nature's actual sights and sounds, as he sets off on his pony. His mother, on the other hand, is all action, determined to find the boy as she fears for his safety, as is the boy, Robin, in *Peter Bell*, both when he seeks his missing father and when he returns to see the ass safely at home.

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<sup>126</sup> See Thelwall's poem 'Lines, Written at Bridgewater, in Somersetshire, on the 27th July, 1797; during a Long Excursion, in Quest of a Peaceful Retreat.' Thelwall writes that his soul is '...sick of public turmoil/—Ah, most sick/Of the vain effort to redeem a Race/Enslav'd, because degenerate;/Lost to hope, because to virtue lost.' See Thomson's article on Thelwall, Wordsworth, and Coleridge in E. P. Thompson, "Hunting the Jacobin Fox," *Past and Present*. 142 (1994). 109.

<sup>127</sup> *CN* III 4066.

This is a curiously staged contrast between an active imagination which apprehends and grasps its subject, and induces it to ‘realise’ its visions, and a passive fancy which leaves the characters involved unable to move at all, or locked into despair. It may not always produce madness but it is more is akin to lunacy. The poet, however, in whom imagination is paramount, is a sane and calm creature whose imagination is allied with reason. The poets in *Lyrical Ballads* are staged as having moved beyond their former superstitious or ‘wild’ selves in ‘The Nightingale’ and ‘Tintern Abbey.’ Coleridge stages the same movement of imagination going beyond superstition’s ‘lore’ in ‘Frost at Midnight’, where Hartley Coleridge is imagined as having a future free to ‘wander like a breeze’ (50-54) in contrast to the superstitiously lonely childhood of the schoolboy Coleridge, waiting for a visitor to appear after seeing the ‘*stranger*’, (26) in the flickering coals of his fire.

## **2. The Body’s Signifiers: Translating Emotion**

While the mind seems to be foremost in these poems, there is also a shifting focus on the body. Many of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* 1798 stage imagination as ‘wild’ or their characters’ fancies as deranged through suffering the loss of love or physical displacement. In the second volume of 1800 the unspoken passion and more deeply felt tenderness of the father in *Michael* or of the two brothers and the grandfather in *The Brothers* are expressed either as unselfconscious but vividly staged retrospective vignettes of their past or younger lives. They also present the waning or the omission of expressions of tenderness, constrained perhaps by habits of civility and custom, ‘heavy as frost’, as Wordsworth expresses it in ‘The Ode.’ Perhaps the omission of ‘acts of kindness’ (‘Tintern Abbey’ 36), – in the second sense of the word kind, denoting relationship – when ‘housed in a dream, unmindful of the kind.’ (‘Elegiac Stanzas,’ line 54) is partly the key to the tragedy in these poems.

The difficult goal of trying to convey in words, what is not actually given expression by these characters is the aesthetic problem Wordsworth sets himself and tries to solve through implicit rather than explicit presentation. Thus, in explaining to Charles Lamb what he means by Miltonic tenderness, he draws attention to Michael's love for his newly born child as being a patient or manly tenderness, which does not affect to 'trade' in words at all. Michael blesses his son Luke during the first few days of his life, performing all the offices of a mother in wordless actions which pour blessings on the child. When Michael first expresses this love to Luke it is at the moment of parting; too late, perhaps, for either to benefit from it. The bond between them is the love they shared in un-expressed forms – innocent play or shared pursuits –when Luke was a boy. The artificial and almost legalised bond, which is made a condition of Luke's inheritance in the hoped for completion of the unfinished sheepfold, seems like an unfortunate and unnecessary translation of that spirit of love into the literalised expression of the letter of the law, in order to realise a dream of future prosperity. Yet the bond which they shared was already complete, simply not expressed. It is that spiritual bond that Wordsworth will bring into conflict with other literal bonds as the narrative unfolds. I will be examining this poem in more detail and in relation to *Richard II* in chapter six..

What binds thought and feeling, mind and body, is something both irrational and rational and is the body's signifiers. We call them the passions, the emotions, the language or codes, which literally 'set in motion'. D. D. Dent perhaps misreads Wordsworth in the above essay on epitaphs, when he writes that the two sages who each find a body on the beach are complementary. Wordsworth's censure of the eloquent ancient sage who, unlike Simonides, who buried the stranger's corpse, appears to have no respect for the body of a dead man, connects this essay with many

of Wordsworth's earlier works such as *The Borderers*, *Peter Bell*, and *The Prelude*'s spots of time, in which the significance of 'the body' becomes important. The seemingly inconsequential ballad 'To A Sexton' in the second volume of 1800 does give vent to that tender feeling for the bodies of those who are buried in the graveyard, which Charles Lamb found so touching that it reduced him to tears.<sup>128</sup>

The revelation of the sanctity of the body, and that of the particularity of the individual, comes upon Wordsworth in the narrative of *The Prelude* with a suddenness likened, almost as a positive anti-type, to the destructive image of 'deluges of sickly German verse' mentioned above, as with 'the might of waters.' This is staged as occurring in an imaginative space in which his mind 'turned round' in a revolution of thought and former opinions. Wordsworth's 'theme' is embodied in the blind beggar, the normally unregarded individual who wears a label on his breast 'telling of who he was.'<sup>129</sup>

Many of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* tell the stories of those who have no voice nor, perhaps, eyes to see. These are people who have been betrayed themselves by a society and a culture which does not even acknowledge that they have feelings, or will sentimentally feel for them, but deny them the right or the means to speak and act. Wordsworth's poetry attempts to translate the silent language of the heart, the unspoken language of the senses, into the intelligible, articulate language of the modern poem, which, as Coleridge said, 'pleads *for* the Oppressed, not *to* them.'<sup>130</sup>

In one obvious sense all poetry and drama, all representations, are, as Theseus says in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, mere 'shadows':

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<sup>128</sup> Lamb and Lamb, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*. I, 273.

<sup>129</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, VII 610-20. Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*. 260.

<sup>130</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. I. *Lectures, 1795, on Politics and Religion*, Bollingen Series 75, ed. Peter Mann and Lewis Patton (London; Princeton NJ: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1971). 43-44.

The best in this kind are but shadows; and the  
worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.<sup>131</sup>

But the imagination has the capacity to actually re-create emotion, or respond to and interpret it rightly as, however extravagant or even incompetently expressed, sincere emotion if that is what it is. The translator Wordsworth accuses of 'idleness and unmanly despair' who deems himself justified in making 'amends' for the inferiority he must submit to if he cannot recreate the actual language of passion, admits a failure or lack of imagination's amending or modifying powers. What is more, if the emotion is rational emotion then the poetry becomes the hand-maid of 'reason in her most exalted mood.' Grief is one such rational emotion. 'Translating' the epitaph written by a man seduced by what he thought of as the 'muse' becomes for Wordsworth the prime act of imagination, of the kind which Theseus sees as imagination's capacity to amend the shortcomings of the mechanicals' too 'palpable, gross play.' It is therefore, philosophically interpreted, allied to the kind of love or feeling intellect which sees 'Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt' or which glorifies a common shepherd.

I have extended my references here to link Wordsworth's early and later comments much in the way that D. D. Devlin does, but in order to highlight Wordsworth's stress on *translation*, and to point out Wordsworth's own pointer to the common link between the two, and the necessity of the imagination and feelings being linked, and particularly in his recognition of the body as the home of those passions which we name 'the human heart' and their effects. But he also is equally aware that the language of poetry is merely a shadow of reality:

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<sup>131</sup> *MND*, V i 210-11.

There cannot be a doubt that the language which it will suggest to him must, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions, certain shadows of which the Poet thus produces or feels to be produced in himself.<sup>132</sup>

Tytler lays all the emphasis on the language of simplicity to exemplify a just taste in prose, and allows a licensed extravagance in poetry, requiring a command of idiomatic language in both the original language and the language of the translation as an important rule. He uses prose to exemplify a natural style but gives no examples of this style from poetry apart from the ballads he uses. This, I would suggest, is one possible reason why Wordsworth may have chosen purposely to present his ‘experiments’ as a challenge to his reader(s). Without a position to argue against, Wordsworth would seem to have been merely asserting a point of view which, as Coleridge argues later in *Biographia*, was already the sound judgement of many. But with Tytler confining his examples of this chaste language to prose, and using Shakespeare and Milton as examples of the florid style, which he designates as the epitome of poetic language, not without some hints at criticism of it in his choice of examples, he may have set a challenge to Wordsworth which I hope to show he takes up by attempting to ‘translate’ Shakespeare and Milton’s sentiments or thoughts. Where he differs from Tytler is in designating the language of poetry not as ideas, in the Lockean sense which Tytler also uses, but thoughts or passion expressed through language or in it, not overdressed or, to use the infant metaphor again, ‘overlaid’ by language.

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<sup>132</sup> *Preface* 1802. This is part of the additional lines on poetic diction and the ‘character of the poet’ added to the preface of 1800. *LB*, Butler and Green, 751.

### 3. Translating Shakespeare

Tytler challenges the translator of ‘no ordinary skill’ to translate the passages he cites from Shakespeare and to “*infuse* into another language the thoughts of the following passages, in a similar species of phraseology’(my italics). As Coleridge was later to point out, using the same argument in *Biographia*, it is impossible to translate the words of a poet into other words of the *same* language without losing the poet’s own particular or personal style, ‘all the propriety [is] lost in the transfer.’<sup>133</sup> The example of loss of propriety which Coleridge uses in this first chapter of *Biographia* is what he calls the ‘imitation’ of Shakespeare by Gray, written in a style which he recalls as having led to many disputes in or around his first Cambridge vacation in 1792, when he first read Bowles’ sonnets, and he was involved in a ‘literary society in Devonshire.’ The lines Coleridge quotes first are from *The Merchant of Venice*.

How like a younker or a prodigal.  
The skarfed bark puts from her native bay  
Hugg’d and embraced by the strumpet wind!  
How like a prodigal she doth return,  
With over-weather’d ribs and ragged sails,  
Lean, rent, and beggar’d by the strumpet wind!<sup>134</sup>

Gray’s imitation employs the kind of poetic diction which Coleridge and Wordsworth censure, and which Wordsworth had at first ‘characterised not so much by poetic thoughts, as by thoughts *translated* into the language of poetry.’<sup>135</sup> He assigned reasons ‘chiefly drawn from a comparison of the Latin poets with the original Greek’ for his preference of Collins to Gray and Shakespeare’s original to Gray’s imitation:

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<sup>133</sup> BL I 20.

<sup>134</sup> *The Merchant of Venice* 2.4.14-19. *ibid.* 20.

<sup>135</sup> BL I 19.

Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows  
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm  
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,  
YOUTH at the prow and PLEASURE at the helm,  
Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,  
That hush'd in grim repose, expects its evening prey.

The particular conjecture that these were 'thoughts *translated* into the language of poetry' was expressed

many years later...far more ably, and developed more fully, by Mr Wordsworth; namely that this style of poetry...had been kept up by, if it did not wholly arise from, the custom of writing Latin verses, and the great importance attached to these exercises in our public schools.<sup>136</sup>

Coleridge goes on to dispute whether it is possible in the present day that a

youth can *think* in Latin, or that he can have any other reliance on the force or fitness of his phrases, but the authority of the author from whence he has adopted them. Consequently he must first prepare his thoughts, and then pick out, from Virgil, Horace, Ovid, or perhaps more compendiously his *Gradus*, halves and quarters of lines in which to embody them.

The thoughts which Tytler feels can be transferred from an English Ballad to a Latin translation of it are, thus, embodied in Latin clichés and phrases, as well as classical imagery, which is as remote from native thought and speech as possible. The lines from Shakespeare draw their imagery from the Bible and their force from the very physical, palpable evocations of the body 'hugged and embraced by the strumpet

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 21.



wind' and returning with 'over weathered ribs.../ Lean, rent and beggared.' The moral thrust of the lines, therefore, is bolstered by its associations with felt experience, and the familiarly evoked Christian parable of the prodigal son. In exchanging these for the personifications, abstractions, and glittering phrases Gray employs, the moral purpose, another sense of 'propriety', is 'lost in the transfer.' The propriety or 'property' in the work then becomes that of the translator, and thus he may be considered an original writer. The moral status of the translator as copyright holder of another writer's thoughts may be questionable, but if the thoughts are to be the general thoughts of mankind, as Wordsworth claims in *The Essay on Epitaphs*, the legal status of the propriety, for him, is not an issue. I will be examining Wordsworth's claims to use the 'commonplace' thoughts and emotions of man in my discussion of *Michael*.<sup>137</sup> These common thoughts, though, as Coleridge writes, were truths so ordinary as to lie 'bedriven in the dormitory of the soul, ...'.<sup>138</sup>

In chapter one of *Biographia* the issue of practical translation is first made one of the leading ideas in the book with the introduction of Coleridge's old schoolmaster Boyer making his students translate classical works, as well as getting them to work out the logic of imagery in Shakespeare and Milton, 'the hardest to bring up,'<sup>139</sup> But when Coleridge, prior to translating Schelling in *Biographia*, gives to the German the propriety, but says the thoughts were his before he read Schelling, we ought to have no reason to doubt him: the English words are his, the German words were Schelling's, but the thought which prompted the expression or the argument may well come from a source far deeper, and far more deeply 'interfused', in the very feelings or emotions which are, or ought to be, natural to man, part of the

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<sup>137</sup> See chapter six below.

<sup>138</sup> *BL* I 82.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 9-10.

emotional responses made to his common consciousness. The world experienced by the senses can verify or refute whether poetic language is vicious or chaste. If the poet's thoughts are not naturally intuited then their source may be revealed to have been through the medium of spoken or written language which is a fiction, in Spinoza's sense of the word.<sup>140</sup> It is in this sense that Wordsworth speaks of true poets possessing 'a power like one of nature's' which can become a second nature.<sup>141</sup>

Can the 'thoughts' of Shakespeare, though, be translated into Wordsworth's, and Tytler's, language of nature, 'just, apposite' and 'natural' with the ease of conversational prose, and still be accepted as poetry?

If Tytler had taken the opportunity to paraphrase, in Dryden's manner, the thought rather than the language of Lear/Shakespeare in the above extract, would it not have been transformed into a plea for charity and for the kind of habitual, almost mechanical fostering of charity which James Chandler has so persuasively argued is Wordsworth's Burkean ethic in *Wordsworth's Second Nature*? The appeal to this second nature is dramatised and staged in *King Lear* as imagination's recognition, in the face of primal nature's un pitying and unfeeling 'pelting storm', that only a truly 'human' nature can 'feel what wretches feel.' Chandler discloses evidence of Wordsworth's early conservative bias, what I would prefer to call his very Shakespearean and Christian moral vision, in his close analysis of *The Old*

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<sup>140</sup> See Christopher Norris, *Spinoza & the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*, The Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory. (Oxford; Cambridge, MA.: Basil Blackwell, 1991). for a discussion of Spinoza's arguments on the relationship of fictions to truth claims and the necessity of distinguishing between the 'mediating role played by *fictions* or 'imaginary' ideas of various sorts—in the process of securing popular assent to doctrines whose ultimate validity (or lack of it) could only be established through the exercise of unfettered critical reason.' Spinoza, as Coleridge comes to conclude in *Biographia*, believed that the authority of the prophets has weight only in matters of morality, and that 'their speculative doctrines affect us little.' 260-61. Norris stresses the importance to Spinoza of St Paul's philosophical deductions as opposed to the evidence of supposed miracles or fictions of the prophets, but also the necessity of keeping matters of law or doctrine outside the domain of speculative thought in order to maintain freedom.

<sup>141</sup> '-forgive me, friend,/If I, the meanest of this band, had hope/...that a work of mine,/Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,/Enduring and creative, might become/ A power like one of Nature's.' *The Prelude* 1805, XII. 305-12.

*Cumberland Beggar*, a poem in which I detect what Tytler calls Shakespeare's or rather Lear's '*verba ardentia*' transfused into the calmer language and steadier vision of Lear's recognition that he has 'ta'en too little care of this.'<sup>142</sup>

Chandler traces the links between Burke's philosophy of nature and Wordsworth's developing grasp of Burke's prophetic vision, from Wordsworth's earliest republican fervour in his letter to the Bishop of Landaff to the late additions to *The Prelude*. There is one passage in the poem he does not comment on and that is the one in which Wordsworth praises those whose great 'works' may have been influenced by experiences in childhood such as his own, in which he recalls seeing those mendicant beggars which he now feels may not much longer be seen. Wordsworth's reference to 'good works' in the passage springs too suddenly into a paean to those 'authors of delight' whose works will live until the end of time to refer solely to philanthropists. In saying that these things were not learned from books Wordsworth once again emphasises the double nature of a wise passiveness, that prompts to those habits of meditation which produce good works learned from both habits of close observation and close reading.

Some there are  
By their good works exalted, lofty minds  
And meditative, authors of delight  
And happiness, which to the end of time  
Will live, and spread, and kindle; minds like these  
In childhood, from this solitary being,  
This helpless wanderer, have perchance receiv'd  
(A thing more precious far than all that books

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<sup>142</sup> James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Or the solitudes of love can do!)  
That first mild touch of sympathy and thought,  
In which they found their kindred with a world  
Where want and sorrow were.

If Wordsworth refers to authors of great works here, he may well be thinking of Shakespeare and those ‘transfused’ elements, which he too refers to in his poem. The ‘curs’ which bark at the ‘creature’, man, in Lear’s speech are those same that in Wordsworth’s poem ‘Ere he have passed the door, will turn away/Weary of barking at him.’ In *King Lear* passion, rage and madness play themselves out in language driven to excess in the face of ingratitude and bestial behaviour, reduced to pleading to ‘reason not the need,’ (II iv 264) and giving the play’s final words to the need to speak ‘what we feel, not what we ought to say.’ (V iii 334) Wordsworth’s language and tone in *The Old Cumberland Beggar* becomes at times so stilled that it almost seems to embody that hushed and steady calm which Wordsworth calls for in his *Essay Upon Epitaphs* which, upholds, feeds, and leaves in quiet.’ Nothing could be remoter from Shakespeare’s heart wrenching and bitter invective used in the speech which Tytler quotes above, but then the dramatic nature of the lines mean that they would be out of place in Wordsworth’s poem. The ‘bad passions’ to be kept in ‘inaction’ that Coleridge had spoken of in the letter to his brother, are muted by Wordsworth’s translation of passion into profound meditative pathos on the part of poet and reader. Coleridge’s position that Wordsworth is more truly a ‘spectator ab extra’ than a dramatic poet, feeling for rather than with his subjects is nowhere more subtly exemplified than in the ‘Old Cumberland Beggar.’

Tytler quotes a passage from Wollaston’s *Religion of Nature* on immortality, which uses the same conventional phrase Wordsworth was later to use in his letter to

George Beaumont after the death of his brother John, when he expressed his hope of ‘another, better world’<sup>143</sup> than this, as the only just conception of the ultimate purpose of a merciful and loving God. The passage echoes Wordsworth’s sentiments to some extent:

Can I be made capable of such great expectations,  
which those animals know nothing of (happier by far in  
this regard than I am, if we must die alike), only to be  
disappointed at last? Thus placed, just upon the confines  
of another, better world, and fed with hopes of  
penetrating into it, and enjoying it, only to make a short  
appearance here, and then to be shut out and totally  
sunk? Must I then, when I bid my last farewell to these  
walks, when I close these lids, and yonder blue regions  
and all this scene darken upon me and go out; must I  
then only serve to furnish dust to be mingled with the  
ashes of these herds and plants, or with this dirt under  
my feet? Have I been set so far above them in life only  
to be levelled with them at death.” Wollaston’s Rel. of  
Nature, sect. 1x.<sup>144</sup>

#### 4. Tytler, *Macbeth*, *Lyrical Ballads*

One might also hear resonances of what Tytler calls the ‘thought’ or ‘idea’ behind one of Wordsworth’s Lucy poems in the same extract, where the speaker talks

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<sup>143</sup> See William Andrew Ulmer, *The Christian Wordsworth, 1798-1805* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001). On Wordsworth’s developing religious beliefs, his ‘romantic Anglicism’ (23) as he calls it, Ulmer argues that his faith in 1798 already ‘verged on Christianity.’ (7) Wordsworth’s letter has often been taken as the mark of a turning to orthodoxy after the shock of John Wordsworth’s death. I am inclined to believe that Wordsworth was not so unorthodox as his poetry implies and that a dramatic reading of his poetry which demands ‘thought’ in order to question the assumptions made by the characters, or assertions of his narrators is, as he himself asks of his readers in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the method which he employed throughout his early work. To question is to play an active role in the process, the kind of questioning which he praises in his *Ode Intimations of Immortality*, not a mere acquiescence or passivity of the kind he was so vociferous in condemning in his criticism of modern sensationalistic writing which leaves the reader supine.

<sup>144</sup> Tytler, 180.

of being mingled with the ashes of herds and plants, and being levelled with beasts in death. Wordsworth, in explaining what he wished to give importance to in his 'experimental' poems, emphasised the importance of the feeling or mood rather than the situation, and the situation or scene in the following poem is conspicuously 'unset', without any context apart from the death of another person.

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears;  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees,  
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course  
With rocks and stones and trees!<sup>145</sup>

The poem expresses and evinces a tone which, as Coleridge terms it, seems like an 'epitaph',<sup>146</sup> but which conveys a mood something more like the terrible, stunned acceptance of death in the moment it occurs rather than later. It is spoken by someone in an almost benumbed state of profound shock, and seems flat, toneless, and desolate when compared to the spirited ironic questioning of the speaker in the extract Tytler uses above. Although the poem may have many sources, as the editors of *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800* note,<sup>147</sup> it has always reminded me of

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<sup>145</sup> *LB* Butler and Green, 164.

<sup>146</sup> 'Some months ago Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime epitaph. Whether it had any reality I cannot say. Most probably in some gloomier moment he had fancied the moment in which his sister might die.' To Thomas Poole from Germany, 6th April, 1799.*CL* I 274.

<sup>147</sup> Butler and Green, 383-4. The editors note various critics' suggestions for sources of the 'Lucy' poems in eighteenth century poetry including Percy's *Reliques*.

Macbeth's reaction to Lady Macbeth's death, especially in the line 'I had no human fears' which tells of someone who has had a kind of reckless courage, almost beyond what is 'natural' or human. In believing the witches' prophecy that he need not fear 'one of woman born,' Macbeth's life has been spent half sleep-walking himself, only half awake to the fact that death itself is what he should fear. The sleep-walking or slumbering, Lady Macbeth is the mirror of his own spirit's dream that he can 'leap the life to come' in fearless denial of judgement. As the doctor says of her, she is in a 'slumb'ry agitation,' (V i 8) and yet she feels still, 'troubled with thick-coming fancies' (V ii 38) through almost every sense - sight, touch, smell, hearing - what she has done. Macbeth has reached a point where he is almost unable to feel anything at all, but the taste is left to him to adumbrate in their mutual catalogue of the 'sense' of guilt.

Macb. I have almost forgot the taste of fears,  
The time has been my senses would have cool'd  
To hear a night shriek, and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir  
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors;  
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,  
Cannot once start me.

*Re-enter Seyton*

Wherefore was that cry?

Sey. The Queen, my Lord, is dead.

Macb. She should have died hereafter.

There would have been a time for such a word.



To-morrow and To-morrow, and To-morrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
 To the last syllable of recorded time  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 (Macbeth V v 9-23)

One could describe Macbeth's last lines as an epitaph of sorts, as it has been described by George Walton Williams in his article "Verbal Echoing in *Macbeth*"<sup>148</sup> It is the stunned reaction of one drained of all feeling except profound shock. Yet Macbeth goes on to say something that is relevant to Wordsworth's poetic project. 'A Slumber did my Spirit Seal' may seem profoundly accepting of death to many critics, but the natural reaction to the thought of being rolled round with 'rocks and stones and trees' in 'life's diurnal course' with all its to-morrows and to-morrows, and to-morrows, is a bleak apprehension, which for most of us is difficult to accept, no matter what religious beliefs we may hold. I think Wordsworth transfers here the concept of time misused and abused in *Macbeth* to one of time and place sharing the same interminable axis. The normal measures of human life and action, time and place, decorum, or prejudice to be precise, which have been so precipitously telescoped and destroyed in this play, are quite suddenly seen by Macbeth to be completely pointless acts. They are so for Macbeth once Lady Macbeth is dead, of course. Yet time catches up with him in the next scene when the trees of Birnam Wood actually do appear to move inexhorably towards Dunsinane.

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<sup>148</sup> George Walton Williams, "Verbal Echoing in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare and Language*, ed. Catherine M. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 243. Williams' argument stresses the dramatic function of the repetition of key words in *Macbeth*. In this case the word is 'hereafter' repeated from the Witches' speech to Macbeth, and picked up by Lady Macbeth, Banquo and Macbeth at key moments in the play.



By re-creating or translating the thought and feeling in Macbeth's speech, which itself is stripped of almost all imagery except the sensuously creeping repetition of one tomorrow after another, Wordsworth manages to make the most static of moments also take in an eternity of movement, so reversing the time shift in Macbeth to one of diurnal repetition, which makes the dead woman's life similarly seem as insignificant as rocks and stones and trees.

In William's article the repetition of crucial words like 'hereafter,' 'hear' and 'here' in *Macbeth* also marks or signposts the manner in which Banquo's failure to act, at the crucial moment when he half suspects Macbeth's intentions on the night of the murder, implicates him too in Macbeth's guilt; a sin of omission not unlike those of Wordsworth's Mortimer and Oswald, or the peasant Eldred who also leaves Herbert to die.<sup>149</sup> Repetition becomes a thematic as well as a rhetorical feature of Wordsworth's play; a doubling which has some important connections with Wordsworth's understanding of imitation itself as being a compulsion which draws human nature away from its originary place in a divine order. I will return to this in discussing *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*.

Wordsworth's poem does not ask the same theological questions as Rollaston's prose when he sees human life levelled with herds and trees, but it does recreate the immediate mood of Macbeth's mind. The nihilism of the following passage from *Macbeth* speaks of the kind of despair which, if arrested there, would resonate with similarities of tone to that of Wordsworth's Mortimer at the end of *The Borderers*, where Oswald's dictum that 'Action is transitory/... Suffering is permanent' sends the hero offstage to endure an alienated guilt without hope of atonement other than in the mercy of death. Julie Carlson links the play, as does Mary

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<sup>149</sup> Cara Norris also notes these sins of omission in her article. See Norris, "The Suspension of Habeas Corpus and Narrative Proliferation in Wordsworth's *The Borderers*", 197.

Jacobus, in relation to Romantic theatre generally, with Schiller's notions of absolute and commanding genius, and the politics of aesthetic distancing which revokes immediate action for withdrawal and meditation.<sup>150</sup> Yet Wordsworth's biography and poetry teaches us that Mortimer's alienation was to be countered by a belief that that kind of despair could be redeemed by realignment, not with the shadows of idealism, but by sequestering the mind's alienated powers and in reconciling the mind with nature. Macbeth's idiot's tale may signify nothing, but the active life he delineates is all pretence:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.<sup>151</sup>

When the main characters in this play are not 'acting' or playing the parts they think they should, they are generally seen re-acting naturally, but then suppressing these natural reactions in order to act as 'custom' dictates, as in Macduff's case on hearing of the murder of his family, and 'dispute it like a man,' rather than 'feel it as a man,'<sup>152</sup> ( IV ii 219-20), or in Mortimer's case, as the avenger of injustice, or in Eldred's and Banquo's cases, as prudent protectors of present and future self-interest.

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<sup>150</sup> See Julie Carlson's chapter on Coleridge's translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*. She also refutes the general tendency of critics to see Coleridge as endorsing the character of Hamlet and his inaction. 'The play demonstrates the "moral necessity" of acting and the practical necessity of the stage in promoting this truth.' Carlson, 55. See also a Freudian approach to this topic in Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on the Prelude*. Jacobus focuses on theatricality in Wordsworth, and the presence of Shakespeare, *Macbeth* in particular, in *The Prelude*.

<sup>151</sup> Macbeth's idiot language like the 'tale told' by Wordsworth's idiot boy is expressed itself in the language of the heart, using words as 'symbols of the passion.' The kind of repetition which Wordsworth justifies here, as used in the Bible, is like the idiot boy's 'burr-burr' and is, perhaps, meant to be understood in this way, where words are felt as 'things', expressing pure passion. Preface 1800. Even the gushing tears of Simon Lee or the chatterings of Harry Gill are expressions of this 'pure' passion.

<sup>152</sup> *Mac* V v 25-28.

When Wordsworth was writing in Germany, he did not intend his readers to see life as worthless, though he did see it as potentially tragic. Neither does he concur with Macbeth's summary that a 'tale told by an idiot', is worthless, for Wordsworth's idiot boy tells a tale of time lost in transport, which signifies nothing less than the wonder of being fearlessly alone in the woods on a moonlit night, and which stages imagination in the form of maternal fears and affection in which no sensationalist language or action interferes with the comic simplicity of the tale, and leaves us in quiet rather than perturbation. This is the opposite of the effect *The Ancient Mariner* has on readers like Charles Lamb.

#### **5. Translation, Burlesque, Parody: Tytler and *Lyrical Ballads*.**

In this sketch of Wordsworth's encounter with theories such as Tytler's principles of translation, I have attempted to outline and to fill a critical gap in our understanding of Wordsworth and Coleridge's turn towards the poetry of conversation and prose by linking it to Tytler's essay, and the part Burns' poetry and critical reception may have played in Wordsworth's response to it. Wordsworth's enthusiasm for German literature and the imitation of Shakespeare's dramatic blank verse style which that involved, occurred more or less at the same time of Burns death in 1796, when he began his play. Tytler published his second edition in 1797, just when Wordsworth and Coleridge decided that translation opened up a field of lucrative employment to them. But it also entailed them looking more closely at their own practices and the language of Shakespeare which Tytler describes above as full of 'glowing phraseology or *Verba Ardentia*', as well as 'new terms' and 'antiquated terms.' Although the speeches Tytler chose to use may seem to exemplify

Shakespeare's language, it is of course far more varied than that, and infinitely more subtle and dramatic in itself.<sup>153</sup>

What is interesting in the context of this thesis, is that Coleridge may be actually referring Wordsworth back to Tytler when he makes the immethodical miscellany which is *Biographia Literaria* hearken back to those days at Alfoxden when he and Coleridge first began work on *Lyrical Ballads*. For glowing words, new terms, and antiquated terms form much of the subject matter of Coleridge's book. Giving one section the sub-title 'On Pedantry,' and including his own new term, *esemplastic*, as well as the older language of the schools in his philosophical chapters, at one stage in chapter nine, Coleridge even engages in comic dialogue with himself on these very issues:

“*Esemplastic*, The word is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere.” Neither have I! ...having to convey a new sense, I thought that a new term would both aid the recollection of my meaning, and prevent its being confounded with the usual import of the word imagination.<sup>154</sup>

How far are we meant to take Coleridge seriously then, when he may actually be as close to the parodist as to the serious philosopher? Tytler may be of help here. But we must start at the beginning, and return to Alfoxden.

Tytler's final chapter is a brief exposition of the principles of burlesque translation and travesty, in which the violation of one of his principles of translation is permissible:

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<sup>153</sup> There has been more scholarship on Shakespeare than on any other author, and that on the language of the plays is the most wide ranging. Every linguistic and critical innovation or approach will produce new ways of appreciating Shakespeare's versatility and dexterity with words.

<sup>154</sup> *BL* I 169-70.

In a preceding chapter, while treating of the translation of idiomatic phrases, we censured the use of such idioms in the translation as do not correspond with the age or country of the original. There is however one species of translation, in which that violation of the costume is not only blameless, but seems essential to the nature of the composition; I mean burlesque translation, or Travesty.<sup>155</sup>

At about the same time that Wordsworth and Coleridge first began collaborating on *Lyrical Ballads* Coleridge produced parodies or travesties of his own, Charles Lamb's and Charles Lloyd's poetic styles as published by Cottle in 1796. These he published in *The Morning Post* in 1797 under the pseudonym of Nehemiah Higginbottom, and at almost the same time began writing *The Ancient Mariner*. In the same first chapter of *Biographia*, in which translation is a focus of his narrative, Coleridge refers also to his own exposure of 'the three sins of poetry' in publishing these sonnets. In the ballad he deliberately used archaisms, and idioms which would have been used at the time of an original composition, as the advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* announced the intention to be:

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER was professedly written in imitation of the *style* as well as the *spirit* of our elder poets; but with few exceptions the author believes that the language adopted in it has been equally intelligible for these last three centuries. The lines entitled EXPOSTULATION AND REPLY, and those which follow, arose out of a conversation with a friend who was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Tytler, 197.

<sup>156</sup> Advertisement, 1978. *LB*, Butler and Green, 738.

The use of archaisms is the strangest of Coleridge's innovations of this time. He removed many of them for the 1800 edition, and when Wordsworth came to write his comments on the poem he made a deliberate point of also criticising the poem on many counts. Dorothy was worried about the old words in this first poem in the volume preventing readers from going on, and Wordsworth decided that he would then replace it with some 'little pieces more suited to the common taste.'<sup>157</sup>

Wordsworth's letter to William Wilberforce, (see below page 158) aligns his purposes with Wilberforce's aims in his *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*, (1797). In this a practical, active Christianity, and an emotional openness and acceptance of, rather than a sceptical, rational response to, the 'peculiar doctrines' of Christianity is the main thrust of his argument against the Unitarians and Quakers.<sup>158</sup> Wordsworth's ballads would seem to demand action as well as thought from the reader then. Perhaps in the case of those characters in his poems who are victims of oppression or betrayal, he would have supported direct action rather than the passivity so many of them exhibit. At the least his transformative poetics might value political reform or reformation as a legitimate response to righteous anger.

Yet why should the archaisms have been included? I cannot help speculating that Tytler's book may have had something to do with it, given the other associations with the book's principles of translation: its praise of the florid diction of the licensed poet; its use of extravagant examples from Pope's translations; and yet its marked preference for chaste and natural language, almost in despite of itself.<sup>159</sup> This is

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<sup>157</sup> EY 264.

<sup>158</sup> EY 684-85. In this letter Wordsworth claims to be as Wilberforce.

<sup>159</sup> For a philological analysis of Coleridge's use of archaisms in the poem, which shows that Coleridge's use of old English idioms was quite precisely matched to the context of a post Chaucerian, and or Renaissance, but pre-revolutionary era, see Richard Payne, "'The Style and Spirit of the Elder

exactly the kind of contradiction which Coleridge claims in *Biographia* was the confused state of some of Wordsworth's readers when they first read *Lyrical Ballads*, and the long essay accompanying the poems to 'persuade them, that

Fair is foul, and foul is fair;<sup>160</sup>

and that 'they had been all their lives admiring without judgement, and were about to censure without reason.'<sup>161</sup> The reversals of opinion on what had once been considered 'fair,' and vice versa, and the appeal to judgement and reason in matters of taste, the law, and, in love, are all staged in the strange reversals and experiences which the lovers and the comic buffoon, Bottom, all undergo in the wood of error, in the supernatural play which is a comic, rather than tragic, staging of imagination.

In the following chapter I intend to pursue some of the Shakespearean influences which were fundamental to Wordsworth's theory of the imagination, most importantly the play which is most often associated with Neo-Platonic theories of the imagination, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and its critical history. I attempt to link that play with the translation theories and transformational impulses which informed Wordsworth and Coleridge's earliest collaborations, with their turn to 'nature', and with the 'art' or 'mechanical' aspects of poetry.

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Poets": The "Ancient Mariner" And English Literary Tradition," *Modern Philology* 75.4 (1978). 368-384. It might well be that there are one or more 'periods' staged in the ballad, pre and post-reformation.

<sup>160</sup> *Macbeth* I i 11.

<sup>161</sup> *BL* I 72.

## Chapter 4 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: The Poet's Eye, the Fairy Queen and Bottom. The Wordsworths and Coleridge in Alfoxden Wood

### 1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: The Romantic Reception.

Citing Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) Jonathan Bate traces the centrality of Theseus' speech on imagination in eighteenth-century aesthetics. Hurd has been arguing that Shakespeare's best plays are those that address themselves to Gothic or magical subjects:

In the tenth letter it is argued that the 'trite maxim of *following Nature*' should not be applied 'indiscriminately to all sorts of poetry', 'the more sublime and creative poetry' addresses itself solely or principally to the Imagination' and therefore has no need of cautious rules of credibility', but can range freely in the 'supernatural world' of wonder and magic.

'In the poet's world all is marvellous and extraordinary', Hurd continues; poetical truth is perceived by the eye 'when rolling in *a fine frenzy*'. The allusion to Theseus' speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is cardinal, for 'The Poet's Eye' was being used more and more frequently as a proof text in discussions of the imagination. The popularity of the allusion may derive from Akenside's use of it in his immensely influential poem *The Pleasures of Imagination*. In a passage concerning 'the plastic powers' of imagination, the poet is described as a 'child of Fancy'; the words of Shakespeare, Fancy's eldest child, are then adapted: 'with loveliest frenzy caught, / From earth to heaven he



rolls his daring eye,/From heaven to earth' (1744 edn.,  
iii. 373-85).<sup>162</sup>

Bate's comment on the speech at this point perhaps indicates a point of divergence from Wordsworth's interpretation of the lines:

The poet's eye rolls from heaven to earth, informing other existences, giving them a local habitation and a name. [In Wordsworth nature is the 'anchor' of his imagination, his purest thoughts. He does not wish to 'inform' any other existences than those of ordinary men and women.] In the mid-eighteenth century, the idea of original genius became increasingly important; a chief characteristic of genius was taken to be its capacity to go outside the self.

Bate goes on to discuss the critical history of the often cited 'protean' image of Shakespeare. He cites Coleridge's many notebook references here to good effect and touches on the distinction between imagination and fancy made later in *Biographia Literaria*, used in the context of Coleridge's notes for his 1811-12 lectures.<sup>163</sup>

Yet we have had relatively less direct criticism of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a *whole* from the Romantic period than one might expect, given the assumptions that are made about its influence. Coleridge's lecture notes and marginalia are brief.<sup>164</sup> Wordsworth appears to say little about the play itself; Keats makes no direct references to it. Yet the theme of 'the dream' is felt to be, and manifestly is demonstrated to be, central in numerous dream poems, notes, allusive echoes of, and references to waking and dreaming or trance-like states and reveries; actual narratives of dreams and nightmares; in the engravings made by Blake, and the

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<sup>162</sup> Bate, (1986), 11.

<sup>163</sup> Bate, (1986), 16

<sup>164</sup> Kennedy and Kennedy reprint all of Coleridge's comments which refer directly to the play.

poetry of Keats, Shelley and Coleridge, and de Quincey's prose especially. The play seems therefore to be of fundamental importance in Romanticism.<sup>165</sup>

Pre-Romantic English critics seemed content with describing the play and its fairy machinery in terms of the poetic licence granted to the poet to create fictional creatures or to draw on the world of folk lore in a more sceptical and enlightened age, purely to entertain. Dryden, in justifying the use of fairies in a rational age, writes that 'Imaging is, in itself, the height and life of poetry,' and fictions such as Hippocentaures or 'creatures which are not in Nature (second notions as the Logicians call them)' were 'founded on the conjunction of two Natures, which have a real separate Being. So Hippocentaures were imag'd, by joyning the Natures of a man and a horse together.' As to the fairies though, they are simply the imitations of other men's fanciful superstitions. The poetic licence allowed in the creation of 'images' of fiction makes the fabulous creatures of myth and romance mere entertainments, signifying nothing in themselves.

The same reason may be allowed for Chymaeras and the rest. And Poets may be allowed the like liberty, for describing things which really exist not, if they are founded on popular belief: of this nature are fairies, Pigmies, and the extraordinary effects of Magick: for 'tis still an imitation, though of other men's fancies: and thus are Shakespeare's *Tempest*, his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Ben Johnson's *Masque of Witches* [*The Masque of Queens*. Ed's. Note.] to be defended.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> See Douglas B. Wilson, *The Romantic Dream: Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams, and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). These focus on either applications of Freudian analysis to the poets concerned, or to altered states of consciousness induced by chemical methods, or opium induced dreams, applied especially to Coleridge's poetry by Ford.

<sup>166</sup> Kennedy and Kennedy, eds., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Introduction, 6. For a detailed bibliography on recent and earlier criticism of the play see the 'Select Bibliography' in this edition,

Like Rowe, the first editor of Shakespeare, and Dryden, Charles Gilden who added a volume 'Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare' to Rowe's edition, emphasised the creation of the fairies as Shakespeare's peculiar talent but justified their place in the play as due to the fact that Shakespeare lived in an age when not just the 'mob, but men of Figure and true Learning' believed in Fairies, and that such 'common Opinion' or belief sanctioned the use of these beings. He at least, though, links the fairies to the creative imagination of Shakespeare as expressed in Theseus' speech on the poet, which he quotes. (*MND* 5.1.4-17) <sup>167</sup>

Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare laid great stress on the clowns and fools as individual characters, with Bottom particularly, to whom he pays more attention than any other character, being singled out for analysis. He sees Shakespeare as ridiculing in the mechanicals' rehearsal and interlude the 'competitions and prejudices of the players.'

*Bottom* who is generally acknowledged the principal Actor, declares his inclinations to be for a tyrant, for a part of fury, tumult, and noise, much as every young man pants to perform when he first steps upon the Stage. The same *Bottom*, who seems bred in a tiring room, has another histrionical passion. He is for engrossing every part, and would exclude his inferiors from all possibility of distinction. He is therefore desirous to play *Pyramus*, *Thisbe*, and the *Lyon* at the same time.' <sup>168</sup>

Johnson's criticism is, like most of the criticism of the period, character criticism, and though many critics such as Richardson produced extensive and popular

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419-435. Since I am using the play here to elucidate the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, much of this excellent and varied work on the play has not been used in this thesis.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. Introduction, 7.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 11.

works on Shakespeare's characters, the most famous being Maurice Morgann's 'Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff.'<sup>169</sup> It was not until the works of German critics such as Tieck and Schlegel were introduced that a different approach to the play was actually published in England. That is not to say, however, that Coleridge and Wordsworth may not have already between them developed an interpretive approach to Shakespeare which was reflected in their works rather than criticism, until Coleridge's later lectures. If Wordsworth and Coleridge first developed their critical understanding of Shakespeare in their poems, this in itself would counter Wordsworth's assertion, (inexplicable to Coleridge), that the Germans first taught the English to read Shakespeare aright.<sup>170</sup> I hope to show in this thesis, how the 'character of the poet', particularly in relation to Wordsworth, which Coleridge tries to present to his readers in *Biographia Literaria*, is, surprisingly, partly elucidated through, if not based on, the character of Bottom, and that he makes an appearance frequently in their writings as a figure far more complexly and philosophically interpreted than by any previous critics.

Whilst we have relatively little extended criticism of the play by Wordsworth or Coleridge, one critic who was friendly with Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey and Carlyle, Abraham Heraud, unlike most of his predecessors, gives an unusually 'philosophical' account of the play, which draws on platonic and Kantian philosophy, and quotes Wordsworth in his account of the meaning of Theseus's speech on the imagination. On Theseus' use of the words 'apprehend' and 'comprehend' he is as

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<sup>169</sup> See William Richardson, *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff, and on His Imitation of Female Characters: To Which Are Added, Some General Observations on the Study of Shakespeare* (New York: AMS Press, 1973). William Richardson, *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters of Richard the Third, King Lear, and Timon of Athens: To Which Are Added, an Essay on the Faults of Shakespeare; and Additional Observations on the Character of Hamlet* (London: John Murray, 1784)., Maurice Morgann, *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, ed. William Arthur Gill (London: Frowde, 1912).

<sup>170</sup> See Wordsworth's Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815.

aware as Coleridge and Wordsworth of the imagination's ability to grasp (the physical connotations of the word may be of relevance here) what reason only understands.

The philosophical reader will do well to consider here the nice propriety with which these two words... are used.' [Quoting Theseus' speech in full, he continues:] For the proper understanding of this all depends on the sense in which imagination is applied, and also the difference between the words 'forms' and 'shapes.' The former are ideas, the latter sensations. The airy nothings' is the prothetic intuition... which - originating in the procreative faculty and that highest moral power of the human intelligence which we term conscience or self-knowledge, and which, in reference to the lower intelligence is indeed a prescience or Foreknowledge - transfers itself as a pure or a priori motive to the will and thus commences a series of rational and intellectual acts which conduct finally to the production of a work of imagination. Such intuition in the beginning is an obscure suggestion, a mere vague impulse, which gradually only generates a distinct idea, that powerfully proceeds to assimilate to itself and subordinate to its use such experiences of the mind as are fittest for its purpose, and thus produces in the consciousness such a synthesis of the ideal and the actual as we recognise for an artistic composition. Such is the process described by Shakespeare in these philosophical lines, not idly here inserted, but anxiously and of a forethought, in the most fitting place that could be found for them... In this exercise of what Wordsworth has since called the 'vision and the faculty divine,' the poet eye first directs its glance to heaven, next to earth, and last to heaven

again, nor till then may imagination project the forms or  
ideas of the work contained in the original intuition.<sup>171</sup>

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, together with Shakespeare's other  
'supernatural' plays, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, has long been considered  
one of the most important influences on European Romanticism generally, in that it  
has been a source of theories related particularly to the imagination and the  
subconscious. It has also been a source of themes and imagery which many of the  
major writers, painters and musicians of the Romantic period drew upon.<sup>172</sup> The play  
continues to be staged by companies of every kind, professional and amateur, all over  
the world and has proved to be one of the most flexible and dynamic in terms of its  
capacity for creative interpretation and often breathtakingly adventurous production  
techniques.<sup>173</sup> Yet when Wordsworth and Coleridge began their collaboration on  
*Lyrical Ballads* it was not considered to be even stageable by many of the period's  
most enthusiastic Shakespearean critics. Reynold's production at Covent Garden in  
Hazlitt's criticism is perhaps the most well known:

Fancy cannot be embodied any more  
than a simile can be painted; and it is as idle to attempt  
it as personate *Wall* or *Moonshine*... When ghosts  
appear at mid-day, when apparitions stalk along  
Cheapside, then may the *Midsummer Night's Dream* be

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<sup>171</sup> John Abraham Heraud. From *Shakespeare: His Inner Life as Intimated in his Works*. (London: 1865). Quoted in Kennedy and Kennedy, 219-224.

<sup>172</sup> Most of the major romantic poets used the play or ideas from it in their work at some time. The dream vision form itself is used by Keats, Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Blake's illustrations and poetry draw heavily on the imagery and iconography of the drama, its staging of imagination and the role of imagination in love and poetry. The notion of the poet's eye as the focus of imaginative activity recurs frequently in writings of the period. See Jonathan Bate, (Oxford, 1986) for a discussion of the play's influence.

<sup>173</sup> For an overview of 20th century productions on stage and in film see Jay L. Halio, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare in Performance, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

represented without injury at Covent-garden or at  
Drury-lane.<sup>174</sup>

Hazlitt notes that astonishingly many foreign and even English critics considered Shakespeare to be ‘a gloomy and heavy writer,’ whereas his

subtlety exceeds that of all other dramatic writers,  
insomuch that a celebrated person of the present day  
said that he regarded him rather as a metaphysician than  
a poet.

Hazlitt may well be referring to Coleridge here, whose lectures on Shakespeare as well as Hazlitt’s own conversations with Coleridge could have been the source of the remark. It certainly fits well with Coleridge’s claims for Shakespeare as the most philosophical of poets in *Biographia Literaria* which was published in July 1817, only two months before *Shakespeare’s Characters* appeared.

Leigh Hunt, writing long after the publication of *Biographia*, in *Imagination and Fancy, or Selections from the English Poets...*,<sup>175</sup> makes Coleridge’s question in *Biographia* and Wordsworth’s in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1802, ‘What is a Poet?’, the focus of his own discrimination in the very broad determination that imagination properly belongs to tragedy and fancy to the comic muse.<sup>176</sup> In doing so, however, he concedes that ‘the terms were formerly identical, or used as such.’ He is critical of Coleridge’s contention that ‘comments and reflections’ have their due place in poetry and uses the passages from the ‘quarrel of Oberon and Titania’ from Act II

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<sup>174</sup> William Hazlitt. *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (London, 1817) 126-34. Reprinted in Kennedy and Kennedy, eds., *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. 90-93.

<sup>175</sup> Leigh Hunt. *Imagination and Fancy, or Selections from the English Poets, Illustrative of those First Requisites of their Art; with Markings of the Best Passages, Critical Notices of the Writers, and an Essay in Answer to the Question ‘What is Poetry?’* (London 1844). Partially reprinted in Kennedy and Kennedy, 145-147.

<sup>176</sup> Rodney Stenning Edgecombe argues that Hunt’s poetry should be re-evaluated as a poetry which offers its own limited but distinct pleasures, and suggests that we should consider the ‘poetry of fancy’ as having had its ‘own particular vector in artistic history, the playful and light-hearted mode of the rococo.’ Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, *Leigh Hunt and the Poetry of Fancy*. (Maddison; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1994). Preface, 10.

of the play in illustration of what he terms Shakespeare's 'purely poetic' language of the fairies. As he writes in the 'Preface' to the book, the extracts, as all of his passages are meant to, shows 'imagination and fancy in a state of predominance, undisputed by interests of another sort.' His own quarrel with Coleridge's philosophical criticism sets the 'pure' poetry' of the fairies apart without considering what the dramatic function of the fairies might be in this play which so obviously does make us reflect on and constantly comments on the imagination and fancy in the dialogue and actions of the other characters in the play.

He knew, however, that fairies must have a language of their own; and hence, perhaps his poetry never runs in a more poetical vein than when he is speaking in their persons; — I mean it is less mixed up with those heaps of comments and reflections which, however the wilful or metaphysical critic may think them suitable on all occasions, or succeed in persuading us not to wish them absent, by reason of their stimulancy to one's mental activity, are assuredly neither always proper to dramatic poetry, still less to narrative poetry; nor yet so opposed to all idiosyncrasy on the writer's part as Mr Coleridge would have us believe.<sup>177</sup>

Hunt's isolation of those passages from the rest of the play does not allow him to comment on what part the 'fairies' play in the metaphysical schema which forms such a central part of the philosophical theme of imagination. Edgecombe, in his commentary on the poetry of fancy does, however, bring in Wordsworth's Preface of

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<sup>177</sup> Kennedy and Kennedy, 146.



1815 in support of Hunt's distinguishing of Fancy's 'playfulness and lightness' from 'imagination's engagement with the 'inherent and internal.'<sup>178</sup>

Wordsworth's distinction seems to make fancy almost an accidental rather than essential element of the mind, and disbars the fancy from playing any active role in the *higher* functions of imagination, other than as a handmaid. Whether he might have been influenced by the play's structural differentiating of the roles of Oberon, Titania, and their agents Puck and the attendants of the Fairy Queen, is a matter for closer comparative analysis, but this division of imagination's functions and roles does bear some similarities to his own poetry of the imagination, especially the early *Prelude*, where spirits of different kinds or degrees are responsible for the development of his growing imagination:

The mind of man is fashioned and built up  
Even as a strain of music. I believe  
That there are spirits which, when they would form  
A favoured being, from his very dawn  
Of infancy do open out the clouds  
As at the touch of lightening, seeking him  
With gentle visitation—quiet powers,  
Retired, and seldom recognized, yet kind,  
And to the very meanest not unknown—  
With me, though rarely, in my boyish days  
They communed. Others too there are, who use,  
Yet haply aiming at the same self end,  
Severer interventions, ministry more palpable—  
And of their school was I.<sup>179</sup>

Wordsworth's staging of the growth of his imagination in *The Prelude*, as it grew from two books in 1798 to five, and then to twelve and thirteen, became more and

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<sup>178</sup> Edgecomb, (1994) 18. I will return to Wordsworth's definition of fancy below.

<sup>179</sup> The Two Part *Prelude* of 1799. [First Part], 67-80. Norton *Prelude*, 3.

more complex as he revised it to include more elements of his life experiences, as well as his reading or imaginative experiences through books. The early two part version became a five part version probably because he could then divide it into the familiar five act division of the Shakespeare play. This, however, is not the place for a full analysis of the poem's debt to the play, but the play's reception by critics of the period and before, helps to put the way that Wordsworth and Coleridge read it into perspective, and highlights their more philosophical approach.

The play stages imagination in its many forms and functions not simply those listed in Theseus's speech on imagination — lunacy, love and poetry —and figures translation in its most comically transgressive form in the character of Bottom the weaver. Leigh Hunt sees the isolation of the 'separate play' of Titania and Oberon within the play as 'easily, and not at all injuriously effected, by the separation of the Weaver from his brother mechanicals.'<sup>180</sup>

The play also raises issues which bring, literally, into the realm of 'play', some of the most pressing political and religious concerns of Shakespeare's own period; concerns which were themselves a result of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular tongue: the problem of difficult texts and their translation by and for the laity.

## **2. The 'Poet's Eye'**

That the first description of Coleridge from the Wordsworths' point of view, penned by Dorothy Wordsworth, refers directly to Theseus' speech ought to tell us

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<sup>180</sup> Kennedy and Kennedy, 147.

something about the assumptions *she* made about the centrality of this speech to the idea of the character of the poet, at least in the physical sense.

You had great loss in not seeing  
Coleridge. He is a wonderful man. His conversation  
teems with soul, mind, and spirit. Then he is so  
benevolent, so good tempered and cheerful, and like  
William, interests himself so much about every little  
trifle. At first I thought him very plain, that is, for about  
three minutes: he is pale and thin, has a wide mouth,  
thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish loose-  
growing, half-curling rough black hair. But if you hear  
him speak for about five minutes you think no more of  
them. His eye is large and full, not dark but grey; such  
an eye as would receive from a heavy soul the dullest  
impression; but it speaks every emotion of his animated  
mind; it has more of the 'poet's eye in a fine frenzy  
rolling' than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark  
eyebrows, and an overhanging forehead.<sup>181</sup>

Dorothy's eye itself glances over and takes in Coleridge's physique, at first registering an almost disappointingly bathetic 'very plain' appearance. Within five minutes, however, she is impelled to a fascination, an almost enamoured wonder at the seductive power of this rather ugly and ungraceful man. Not a positive note is sounded until he opens his mouth. His eyebrows are fine and dark, his brow overhanging, (there is certainly a touch of the demonic here), but the power of that conversation teeming with 'soul, mind and spirit' is given the sanction of Shakespeare's characterisation of the poet, not Dorothy's. What is more, Dorothy knows that her correspondent, Mary Hutchinson, ought to know exactly to what

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<sup>181</sup> Wordsworth, The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Early Years 1787-1805. 188-89. June 1797.

qualities she refers when she quotes the line. As Juliet Barker comments on Dorothy's response to meeting Coleridge, she was, quite simply, "bowed over."

Coleridge's own response to Dorothy is as equally aware of her critical acumen as her physical shortcomings. He is as impressed too by the quality of her mind as she of his and his account is curiously similar in structure to hers of him.

She is a woman indeed! – in mind , I mean & heart – for her person is such, that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her ordinary-If you expected an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty! – But her manners are simple, ardent, impressive –In every motion her most innocent soul Outbeams so brightly, that who saw would say, Guilt was a thing impossible in her. –Her information various – her eye watchful in minutest observation of nature –And her taste a perfect electrometer- it bends, protrudes, and draws in at subtlest Beauties & most recondite faults.<sup>182</sup>

In this same letter Coleridge asks Cottle to 'pick up' copies of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet* for Wordsworth.

Nearly twenty years later in the Preface of 1815, Wordsworth turns to the same speech from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to bolster his own distinction of imagination and fancy from memory, as he interprets the definitions given in *British Synonyms Discriminated*, by W. Taylor from which he has earlier quoted:

It is not easy to find out how imagination, thus explained, differs from distinct remembrance of images; or fancy from quick and vivid recollection of them; each is nothing more than a mode of memory. If the two words bear the above meaning,

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<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Juliet R. V. Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000). 129. *CL* I 330.

and no other, what term is left to designate that faculty of which the poet is 'all compact;' he whose eye glances from earth to heaven, whose spiritual attributes body forth what his pen is prompt in turning to shape; or what is left to characterise Fancy, as insinuating herself into the heart of objects with creative activity? Imagination, in the sense of giving title to a class of the following Poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.<sup>183</sup>

Wordsworth's own definition replaces 'imagination' with spiritual attributes. This is curiously plural, as though he is not sure whether imagination can be confined to one faculty. And when he comes to discuss Fancy he gives more than a shape to Fancy itself which embodies a gendered, feminine wiliness which borders on that same Coleridgean, seductive charm which bowled over Dorothy. What one can see clearly is that 'spiritual attributes' carries more religious and moral connotations than Theseus' dismissive 'airy nothings.' Wordsworth's definition is much more seriously motivated than Theseus' wry comments. One could also argue that in defining Fancy in this way Wordsworth literally 'characterises' an 'airy nothing' in the moment of its presentation to his own mind as the seductress of the mind. That she, Fancy should insinuate herself into the 'heart' of objects in this questionable yet playful way, is perhaps indicative of his own uncertainty about the relative value of the poetic products of his own mind when he re-arranged the poems in the 1815 edition into

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<sup>183</sup> William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, New Edition. Revised by Ernest de Selincourt. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). 755.

such a complex division of moods, faculties and affections; and that he should have found it so difficult to decide exactly under which category they should finally each be placed. Fancy's alignment with the heart is perhaps nowhere so tentatively and regretfully expressed as in the last few lines of *The Waggoner*, dedicated to Charles Lamb in 1819, and again produced after Coleridge had published *Biographia Literaria*. These lines, together with the preface to the poem, seem to look back to a period which is hard to date. Either the ten years is prior to publication or prior to the poem's composition, which is thought to be around 1805. That would put the ten years gap nearer to the period when Wordsworth was in the West Country.

Accept, O Friend, for praise or blame,  
The gift of this adventurous song;  
A record which I dared to frame,  
Though timid scruples checked me long;  
They checked me — and I left the theme  
Untouched; — in spite of many a gleam  
Of fancy, which thereon was shed,  
Like pleasant sunbeams touching still  
Upon the side of a distant hill:  
But Nature might not be gainsaid;  
For what I have and what I miss  
I sing of these; — it makes my bliss  
Nor is it I who play the part  
But a shy spirit in my heart  
That comes and goes— will sometimes leap  
From hiding-places ten years deep;  
Or haunts me with familiar face,

Returning like a ghost unlaid,  
Until the debt I owe be paid.  
Forgive me then; for I had been  
On friendly terms with this machine.<sup>184</sup>

This spirit of fancy is acknowledged here as a natural endowment of the poet and one to whom he does owe as much of a debt as to imagination for her loftier gifts. None the less, imagination is not always easy to define. If *Peter Bell* is considered to aim at a 'higher tone of imagination and deeper touches of passion' compared to *The Waggoner*, one can sense that each poem is defined by Wordsworth less by its relationship to the kind of poetry, (it could be argued that *The Waggoner* is 'loftier' or finer poetry than the more balladic *Peter Bell*) than to the religious and moral connotations each is said by Wordsworth to evoke.

The final example given in the Preface of 1815, which we are to accept as exhibiting these 'fixed laws' of imagination, its conferring and modifying powers, is the comparison between lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a conceit ascribed to Lord Chesterfield in which the 'dews of the evening' and Milton's mutterings of thunder which '...sad drops/ Wept...' as rain, is the common 'tearful' element. The difference Wordsworth ascribes is in the application of Milton's conceit to the 'transgression of Adam' which is so 'momentous' that the 'justice and reasonableness' of the 'sympathy in nature so manifested' is acknowledged by the mind. Thus the sublime poetry of Milton conveys 'just' and 'reasonable' analogies because of its religious context. Yet in classifying his poems in that same 1815 edition Wordsworth seems uncertain as to what exactly imagination or the 'soul's' capacity to create is capable of conveying. I use the word conveying here because in terms of the

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<sup>184</sup> *The Waggoner*, Canto 4, 197-217.

transfer of meaning, or the translation or interpretation of any experience (whether of actual experience or poetic texts) *into* something meaningful which is of religious or moral significance, we are sometimes left wondering where the connection is to be found, and Wordsworth often qualifies his definitions to suit the context.

Also pertinent to my argument on the continuing centrality of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Wordsworth and Coleridge, is Wordsworth's epigraph to the sonnet of 1807 'Though Narrow be that Old Man's Cares, and Near' whose final line, 'The poor old man is greater than he seems:' links it to the seemingly loftier Duddon Sonnet 'I thought of thee my partner and my guide.' The sonnet's closing line: 'We feel that we are greater than we know,' registers a humbler uncertainty about man's greatness which reflects on the earlier poem's more confident assertion. The epigraph to the earlier sonnet is also taken from Theseus' speech: '—gives to airy nothing/ A local habitation and a name.' While imagination is not named in the quotation the omission itself stages imagination in the orthographical trick of the Sternean blank space, but the reader must know the speech in order to recognise the allusion's relevance to the poem. In the speech itself the poet's pen turns imagination's 'forms' into 'shapes' and it is from this shaping that we infer a local habitation and a name. In the Fenwick note to this sonnet he identifies a particular person as the character in the poem, seeming to show with what care he might have given the name, and the location.<sup>185</sup> The generalised 'old man,' however, is meant to define a common situation and a general superstition. The 'narrow' sphere of the man's life is confined but by no means limited by that confinement, and the sonnet is the form in which he

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<sup>185</sup> William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, The Cornell Wordsworth, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1983). 422. The note, which gives the old man's name as Mitchell, also refers to another man employed at Coleorton during the period when Wordsworth was visiting, as one who followed him around as he composed verses aloud, often remembering lines from them. The superstitions regarding the stars are noted as 'general all over Europe' in a note to the poem only included in *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807 but omitted after 1820.



chooses to express the immensity of the mind's capacity to overcome those apparent limits of setting and status.

For he hath waking empire, wide as dreams;  
An ample sovereignty of eye and ear.  
Rich are his walks with supernatural cheer;  
The region of his inner spirit teems  
With vital sounds, and monitory gleams  
Of high astonishment and pleasing fear.

While what the old man sees and hears are the shapes of fancy, and local, and also common European tradition, as Wordsworth's note to the poem points out. The old man sees 'Gabriel's hounds' in the sky. Wordsworth by no means denigrates this capacity for wonder. The levelling process involved in this infrequently noticed poem brings not only the hierarchical notions of empire and sovereignty down to the mundane level of an old man's imagination, but relocates the sublime attributes of astonishment and pleasing fear within the compass of a nightly walk. Ignorant though the man may be, his 'inner spirit' enfolds a wealth of unsophisticated 'cheer' which is a direct challenge to enlightenment theories of both the moral and social implications of an all too knowing common sense philosophy. This would marry the progressive amelioration of mankind with the banishment of such traditional lore of the skies, in order to embrace the kind of knowledge or 'wisdom' which is defined by the progress of contemporary astronomical science. This optimistic faith in the progress of human morals and social improvement was part of the general enlightenment philosophy of continual progress which such advances in science and economic theories was meant to inevitably produce.

In a recent article Anne Janowitz draws upon Adam Smith's essay *On Astronomy* to examine the relationship of changing theories or paradigms of the sublime during the enlightenment to the emergence of Newtonian physics, and its application by moral philosophers to theories of social and moral improvement.<sup>186</sup> Adam Smith's 'campaign against the sublime,' as the title of her article suggests, was meant to marry common sense notions of the beneficial effects of the banishment of superstition and ignorance, most especially of 'astonishment and surprise,' to the then paradigmatic 'force' of imaginative 'sympathy.'

The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* proposes social coherence by way of the imagination's effect on the 'force' [also a common Newtonianism] of sympathy amongst persons...Smith's noble machine powered by sympathy through identification requires a particular kind of imagination, a benign, grand, beautiful, social imagination. The motor of the machine is the principle of attraction: "All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bonds of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices"( *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Section II ii 15).

Wordsworth, however, was all too aware of the 'force' of this kind of fancy in a negative sense. It seems to have had no bearing on, for instance, the capacity of the speaker of 'A slumber did my spirit seal' to accept the death of the female or feminised 'spirit' complacently. It is as though the speaker simply responds to her death as an acceptance of the power of gravity. The emotional impact is deadening in itself. This is the dominant mechanical philosophy which Coleridge so vociferously complains of, and what I read as part of that 'false imagination' which Wordsworth

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<sup>186</sup> Anne Janowitz, "Adam Smith's Campaign against the Sublime," *The Wordsworth Circle* XXXV.1 Winter (2004).12.

denigrates in *The Prelude* book eleven, as that which distracted him from a deeper understanding of the relationship between imagination and the human heart, and the necessity of self-sacrifice which true charity involves.

But enflamed  
With thirst of a secure intelligence  
And sick of other passion, I pursued  
A higher nature-...  
...[he] sacrificed  
The exactness of a comprehensive mind  
To scrupulous and microscopic views  
That furnished out materials for a work  
Of false imagination, placed beyond  
The limits of experience and of truth.<sup>187</sup>

The naivety in the Smithsonian thesis of assuming that a wealthy farmer's benevolence might extend as if by the power of an increase in knowledge and wealth alone, to sympathy with a poverty stricken neighbour is staged in the negative relationship between Goody Blake and Harry Gill. In a notebook entry of 1808, probably intended for *The Friend*, Coleridge notes exactly what Smith's self assured notions of the 'force' of imaginative sympathy alone could or could not do.

To compare the state of a rich man  
perfectly Adam Smithed & Mackintoshed, yet with a  
natural good heart – then to suppose him convinced,  
vitally convinced of his system of hope & of confidence  
in Reason and Humanity – to compare his hours, his  
reflections – the feelings with which he would receive

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<sup>187</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, II 848. (Norton, 404)

his rents, contemplate his increase of power by wealth-  
the employment avertive of all vacancy & disgust<sup>188</sup>

Harry Gill's mind is filled not with shapes, but with an idea, a curse which produces an affect so strongly on his imagination that he literally believes himself to be freezing to death, and his teeth 'chattering' tell us it is so. Perhaps we could say that it is the very form of the curse itself which creates the belief, and he feels, not understands, the power of the imagination to create its own astonishing effects; and, by means of a few black forms on paper, so does the reader.

But this is again the staging of despair, the opposite extreme of the 'system of hope' that Coleridge speaks of in the passage referring to Smith and Mackintosh above. That the affections or emotions are more closely aligned with fancy in most of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's definitions does not preclude,<sup>189</sup> as I have tried to show above, the possibility of imagination being the source of, the common root as Coleridge would write in *Biographia*, of both, in consciousness itself and the intimate relationship of that to the body's signifiers, the emotions, of fear and desire.

One can also see how the translation of the old woman's curse into a physically overpowering obsession stages lunacy or madness as an effect of a fearfully potent auto suggestive 'force' which has little to do with Newtonian gravity except as an apt analogy. Whereas the old man of the sonnet can create pictures in the mind's eye which are a response to the imagined lines made between the stars

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<sup>188</sup> *CN* III 3435

<sup>189</sup> See various discussions of Coleridge's distinction between imagination and fancy for this alliance of fancy with the affections. J. R. de Jackson, 'Fancy Restored to Dignity.' (1969) in John Spencer Hill, ed., *The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1977). 145-158, makes the connection via an examination of Coleridge's notebooks. In the same volume J. A. W. Hefferman writes on the imagination's transformative power in 'Wordsworth and the Transforming Imagination.' *Ibid*, 166-175. My own use of the term 'transformation' links it with the act of translation and imitation involved in re-creating the poetry of another writer, rather than the transforming of natural objects alone, which that article concentrates on.

themselves, and to an oral and written tradition which has its roots in the Bible as well as classical lore (he sees 'Gabriel's hounds'), the words uttered by Goody Blake physically weaken Harry Gill, as opposed to the strengthening, in Betty Foy's and her sick neighbour's case, of an 'instinct abandoned by judgement.'<sup>190</sup> The old man's judgement well knows that the stars are simply stars, but the pleasure of the imagination's creative response is in its freedom from the constraints of science and judgement in this case. If Coleridge's words are taken as simply a matter of illustrating the fact that imagination and love simply do not judge, then the dictates of the heart would be the factor which Wordsworth clearly quite happily celebrates in Betty Foy's reactions. She may have been 'unwise' to send Johnny on his night errand but the adventure proves only the extent of her love when she is threatened with his loss. Perhaps a 'wise' passiveness, or openness to the instinctive in this case, can be contrasted with an *unwise* passiveness in others.

### 3. The Fairy Queen and Love

A major aspect of love staged in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is Titania's maternal doting on the changeling boy; judgement has no part in that love. She rears him solely because she and the child's mother were linked by that order of 'nature' of which his mother is a votary, and as a reciprocal gesture of love 'for her sake' she will not part with him. The effect of fancy - 'love in idleness' - which has its effects while she sleeps - though, is to turn her away from that into idolising an ass. Judgement and reason is what is lacking in all the characters' actions, except, of course, for those lunatics, lovers, and poets who Theseus sees as *all* imagination. Love sees not with the eyes but with the mind, but only when the heart itself is somewhat cold, can it be said to be a rational love. The lack of warmth in this scheme of things is a dualism or

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<sup>190</sup> BL II 48.

binary opposition which may need that third thing, a created 'body' for affection to adhere in. In the case of Titania and Oberon it is in the changeling child itself. When the all too palpable Bottom appears, as body personified almost, he becomes a substitute for the changeling boy. If, as Bottom says, 'Reason and Love keep little company these days' (*MND* III i 138-39) and we are to take this as referring to the two, then the usual gendered distinction between Imagination and Reason in philosophy applies in this play.<sup>191</sup> The mingling of masculine and feminine attributes in Hyppolita and Theseus, each influenced by Titania and Oberon at different times, suggests that Shakespeare stages these 'powers' as cross-gendering influences.

Coleridge's 'shaping spirit of imagination', as it is described in *Dejection*, is his ability to poetically produce the shapes that are recognisably more human or 'fanciful' than the 'forms' which ideas take in the platonic realm of pure intelligence, but they are more like those works of Plato which are products of the imagination, the *Ion* and *Timaeus*; more productive of poetry like 'Christabel' or 'The Ancient Mariner' than the seemingly more discursive poetry of 'Dejection.' Neither love nor poetry can be creative, however, without the passion Coleridge attempts to suppress, but cannot, by distracting himself in metaphysical research. The suppression of man's capacity for passionate emotion, which is advocated in philosophical schemes for the 'amelioration' of mankind such as Godwin's *Political Justice*, is what Coleridge and Wordsworth both recognised as an example of the failure of pure idealism's attempt to provide a political or philosophical remedy for the ills of society.

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<sup>191</sup> See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, Ideas. Series Ed. Jonathan Ree (London: Methuen, 1984). This very wide ranging survey sheds much light on the way that the play stages the powers of the mind as gendered in their fancied operation on men and women; but operative and influential in both sexes. Lloyd examines the gendered concept of reason across a very wide historical range. Even as late as this century, Lloyd shows how Freud still sees women as being morally inferior to men because they do not act from reason, but are motivated by the affections (69). Interestingly, Wordsworth does not overtly distinguish them. Imagination is 'reason' in 'her most exalted mood.' *The Prelude*, XIII 170.

Imagination too is gendered feminine (as conventionally befits the muses) in *The Preface*, with Fancy taking the lower place. Nature is ‘A handmaid of a nobler than herself’ in the 1805 *Prelude*, ( XIII, 240), and in keeping with Coleridge’s later linking of imagination with reason, and of sexual love with reason, that form of imagination which is ‘love more intellectual’ in Book 13 of *The Prelude* is ‘Reason in her most exalted mood.’<sup>192</sup> Or is it rather that imagination in her most exalted mood is capable of expressing reason, as Wordsworth seems to imply in the case of the example from Milton, above? Whichever way we choose to interpret that passage, fancy is not able to reach the spiritual heights imagination has led Wordsworth to attain. Siting the first apocalyptic vision of imagination in the alps, and apostrophising the sublime imagination as hope, expectation, and desire, and the vision of a ‘mighty mind’ on Mount Snowdon as of one who listens to the co-mingled ‘roar’ of the voices of mighty poets whose original inspiration is divine, Wordsworth’s great poem dramatises the primary and secondary imaginations of Coleridge’s distinction, as both a primary vision which is natural, and as a secondary source of power which is the provenance and creative source of and for later poets’ inheritance.

#### 4. The Lyrical Dramatised

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is the play which seems to be most often associated with the idea of the romantic poet. Jonathan Bate’s researches show that Theseus’ speech on the poet’s eye was anthologised more frequently in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century in volumes displaying the ‘beauties of Shakespeare’ than any other,<sup>193</sup> and it is often said that the play itself is the most

<sup>192</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XIII 166. This is revised to ‘spiritual love’ in the 1850 version (XIV 188).

<sup>193</sup> See Bate, (Oxford,1986) 30.

lyrical and romantic of Shakespeare's dramas. Coleridge himself, as I note in chapter one, described the play as a 'dream throughout' and as an exposition of the 'lyrical dramatised':

The interfusion of the Lyrical, of that which in its very essence is poetical, not only with the Dramatic...

...but as part of the dramatic— the whole *Midsummer Night's Dream* is one continued Specimen of the Lyrical dramatised.<sup>194</sup>

This most important note on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is virtually the only comment we have on Coleridge's reading of the play as concerned *wholly* with the lyrical or poetic, and actually dramatised or staged in the play. If that is so, then even the character of Bottom and the other mechanicals must also have been understood by Coleridge as playing a part in the staging of the lyrical. Each part of the play can contribute to our understanding of what the lyrical actually meant to Wordsworth and Coleridge in their choice of the title *Lyrical Ballads*. It is not simply that the lyrical is related to music, as in songs, but to an attitude of mind which recognises and appreciates the beauty of the lyrical, as it is also appreciated even by the most ordinary of men and in the simplest of forms. This lyricism is most obviously staged in Titania and in her role as the creatrix of the beautiful, but she also has her train of 'helpers' whose role it is to beautify nature:

Fairy And I serve the Fairy Queen

To dew her orbs upon the green

The cowslips tall her pensioners be

In their gold coats spots you see;

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<sup>194</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol.5. Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, Bollingen Series 75, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. (London; Princeton, NJ.: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1987). II, 118.



Those be rubies, fairy favours,

In their freckles live their savours

I must go seek some dew-drops here

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear (*MND* II I 8-15)

Here the 'beauty-making'<sup>195</sup> power of the lyrical makes 'musically' present to the listener's or reader's imagination a re-vitalised vision of the every day world of a village green by simply evoking cowslips. But they are cowslips in a setting made to appear magical by the addition of dew drops which sparkle like pearls. This aspect of the lyrical is one which Coleridge tells us impressed him when he first heard Wordsworth read a manuscript poem at Alfoxden:

It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought;  
the fine balance of truth in observing with the  
imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed;  
and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the  
*atmosphere*, and with it the depth and height of the ideal  
world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which ,  
for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the  
lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops.<sup>196</sup>

It is interesting that the allusion to this part of the play, in which the 'supernatural' elements are first staged to the audience in the encounter of the 'handmaid' fairy with Puck, occupies a place in Coleridge's narrative which is structurally similar to that of the play itself, in that it is introduced at the point when Coleridge meets Wordsworth. This led, he tells us, and leads in the narrative of *Biographia Literaria*, directly to his recognition of, and determination to prove, that there are two different faculties of imagination and fancy, rather than, as he had

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<sup>195</sup> 'Dejection', 63. Coleridge's ode is a counterpart to Wordsworth's 'Ode', using the same elements, but given a more personal slant by the pathos of loss, and of unrequited love.

<sup>196</sup> *BL* I 80.

hitherto believed, that they were ‘the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.’ The passage has a long footnote referring to Wordsworth’s 1815 Preface above, and the discrimination of similes in Taylor’s volume mentioned by him. The distinctions made between words formerly thought synonymous, Coleridge tells us, eventually become of such general currency:

that the language itself does as it were think for us  
(like the sliding rule which is the mechanic’s safe  
substitute for arithmetical knowledge) we then say, that  
it is evident to common sense.

He is still talking here about imagination and fancy though, and he argues that ‘common sense itself differs in different ages,’ and ‘what was born and christened in the schools passes by degrees into the world at large, and becomes the property of the market and the tea-table.’ He hints that there may well be common sense uses of the words today which were not the same, as he mentions, in the post-revolutionary reign of Charles II, when the ‘philosophic world was called to arms by the philosophical sophisms of Hobbes.’ (*BL* I 87) Not the same then, as they were in the age, say, of Shakespeare. He has managed, though, to bring into the discussion of imagination and fancy, the possibility that there are mechanics who know how to use a slide rule and have no idea of arithmetic, or poets who are not philosophers; the result will be the same at a certain level of competence, but the higher levels of knowledge and skill will be beyond them.

The dependence of the *expression* of the lyrical on the mechanical aspects of form and structure is, however, an aspect of the play’s comedy that is most often overlooked.

Shakespeare stages the structural and ‘mechanical’ aspects of the lyrical in poetry through the humorous portrayal of the ‘mechanicals’ themselves in the play. Bottom as the weaver, as well as the base or foundation of the poetic or lyrical character, embodies the capacity of the poet to transform diverse materials, the stuff of poetry into finer or coarser productions. ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ as presented by Quince’s men is the coarsest of versions. Bottom is accompanied by Snug the joiner whose skills ought to ensure a tight fit between the units he binds together, a fitting which ought to show no loose joints or weak points or unjust proportions. Flute the bellows mender is a comic purveyor of the kind of inspiration needed to keep the embers of the sacred flame of inspiration alive. His name too supplies a lyrical link with the mechanical reproduction of the lyrical by way of a musical instrument, the flute. Coleridge uses this analogy when he refers to the age of Chaucer and Gower as a ‘wilderness of vocal reeds, from which the favourites only of Pan or Apollo could construct even the rude Syrinx, and from this the constructors alone could elicit strains of music.’

But now, partly by the labours of successive  
poets...language, mechanized as it were into a  
barrel-organ supplies at once both instrument  
and tune.<sup>197</sup>

Snout the tinker’s structural batterings<sup>198</sup> might be said to shape and bend matter, crudely welding it together, but his tinkering should leave no chinks, unlike the wall which he eventually ‘presents’:

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<sup>197</sup> *BL* I 38.

<sup>198</sup> I use this word in conscious allusion to Wordsworth’s ‘The Tinker’ who visits the villages to ‘batter, batter, batter’ his wares or repairs, and who the village maidens are frightened of because he looks so rough cast and sooty himself. He though, is happy and sings his songs and drinks his ale without a thought of tomorrow’s resting place. Wordsworth’s poem is as crude and carelessly, rhythmically random as the tinker’s batterings. What Wordsworth stresses in the poem is the tinker’s supposed

In this same interlude it doth befall  
 That I, one Snout by name, present a wall...  
 ...This loam, this rough-cast, and this stone doth show  
 That I am that same wall; the truth is so;  
 And this the cranny is, right and sinister,  
 Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.<sup>199</sup>

Made with loam, rough-cast and all too solid stone, this wall may be structurally sound, but potentially liable to 'chinks' in the fabric. Perhaps this an allusion to the failures in structural soundness that the pieces made by lesser mortals are heir to, but also to the dual nature of imagination, which the gap in the wall that separates the lovers exemplifies. It is both right, and ludicrously here, sinister that they should break through that barrier to a fraught and, in their case, fatal freedom. But this imagery is as mechanical as the artisans who use it, and unlike the imagery employed by Titania and Oberon, is generally taken from the world of art or manufactured things rather than the organic world of nature. The natural music of the wind in Wordsworth's *Prelude* where the 'ancient music of the earth' speaks to a 'fleshly ear made quiet' is the counterpart to the music of the flute, the mechanical instrument which makes analogous sounds by whispering through the chinks. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth refers to his childhood friend who played the flute so beautifully on the island where they left him, the 'minstrel of the troop,' until, listening and absorbing the beauty of the scene,

... the calm  
 And dead still water lay upon my mind  
 Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky

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distance from the worries of conventionality, either of appearance or in terms of the poem itself, of the constrictions of an elevated form, yet he serves a purpose for which his special skills are needed.

<sup>199</sup> *MND*, V i 154-63

Never before so beautiful, sank down

Into my heart and held me like a dream.<sup>200</sup>

This seduction of the young Wordsworth by music and natural beauty in the early version of *The Prelude* is later re-iterated in the boy of Winander making his own ‘mimic hootings to the silent owls’ by cupping his intertwined fingers to his mouth ‘as through an instrument’ (*The Prelude*, 1805. V 396-98). If we think of Coleridge’s analogy with the Syrinx it becomes clear that in the second instance, the poet is the ‘constructor’ both of the mock instrument he makes, as well as the ‘language’ that he uses. It is not merely mechanically reproduced, clichéd, or so unfamiliar an incident either, once we see that it has been created by what Coleridge calls ‘the instrument’<sup>201</sup> of imagination, which is the poet’s own, and the responsive reader’s.

But the comedy of the play plays on such ludicrous analogies as Flute the Bellows mender with poetic inspiration, and Snout the tinker with the *makere* or maker of poetry, for laughs only, apparently, rather than profound thoughts. The wall is both a mechanical ‘device’ for their play and metaphorically/literal in Pyramus and Thisbe, but it is also a Snug fitting of the mind and art.. There is a logic to the use of the metaphor which ‘makes sense’.

Shakespeare uses similar wall imagery in *Antony and Cleopatra* when he has Caesar hope that Octavia will be the cement which bonds him with Antony rather than the battering ram which is to destroy their alliance.<sup>202</sup> In one of the rare moments, as Theodore Leinwand draws our attention to, when he seems puzzled by the apparent

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<sup>200</sup> *The Prelude*, 1799. (Norton, 1979), 210-214.

<sup>201</sup> ‘By what instrument this is possible the solution itself will discover, at the same time that it will reveal, to and for whom it is possible. Non omnia possumus omnes.’ *BL* I 299.

<sup>202</sup> *Most noble Antony*,

Let not the piece of virtue which is set  
Betwixt us as the cement of our love  
To keep it builded, be the ram  
To batter the fortress of it. (*A & C*. III ii 27-31)

inconsonance of Shakespeare's metaphor, and the incongruity of the 'eye image', Coleridge felt that the logic failed: 'Let that which is the mortar of the wall, be turned to a ram!' he wrote in the margin, and would have preferred 'a beam, or buttress tree, or slant column.'<sup>203</sup> But given the character of Caesar and his cold, rationalistic, political use of his sister, whom he does appear to love, the illogicality of the very act is staged in the mechanical imagery itself. Compare the lines describing Octavia which Antony is given, the justly praised sensitivity of '...the swan's down feather/That stands upon the swell at full of tide/ And neither way inclines,' and the contrast between Antony and Caesar, seems fairly clear. Antony must know too that the tide will turn sometime, as he will later when he turns his ship in the naval battle and sails after the fleeing Cleopatra. But it is Enobarbus who makes logic, opposed to love, the condition of a generalised political subterfuge which destroys human relationships. Speaking, in the same tearful parting scene above, of Antony weeping over the deaths of Julius Caesar and Brutus, he wryly comments:

That year indeed he was troubled with a rheum.

What willingly he did confound he wailed,

Believ't, till I wept too. (III ii 58-60)

Enobarbus' irony will rebound on himself at the end of the play when his own political pragmatism is outplayed by Antony's generosity, and he dies weeping in and of the knowledge of his own betrayal of the Antony he loved. The logic of Shakespeare's imagery is paradoxically most logical when it seems least so. Caesar sees both images because he imagines his sister as the means by which he will wage war with Antony right from the moment the marriage suggests itself to him. The logic of this kind of sacrifice is something which I will return to when I discuss

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<sup>203</sup> Quoted in Theodore Leinwald, "Shakespeare, Coleridge, Intellecturition," Studies in Romanticism 46. 1, Spring (2007). 97.

Wordsworth's poem *Michael*, in which the covenant imposed by him on his son Luke and his sending him away, is similarly staged as a pragmatic solution to an economic impasse, which strikes us as something which earlier in his life would have been an unthinkable sacrifice, given Michael's love for his son.

Peter Quince, as befits a carpenter is a more refined craftsman than his companion Snug the joiner. His pieces would be more elegantly structured and would show some skill in design and decoration; a more educated taste, perhaps, as is demonstrated in his portrayal as the more knowledgeable director of the play. He is the one who decides who is most suitable to play the parts for example.

Robin Starveling the Taylor has the 'hard handed' job of stitching together and fitting to individual taste and fit the fabrics woven by Bottom. Unfortunately his name suggests that the poverty of his customers does not stretch to using his skills that often. All these tradesmen exemplify the mechanics of putting a play together soundly and comprehensively, without having, however, the skills needed to make the piece less ludicrous than when it finally appears on stage. Quince's imagery, once all the parts have been handed out, turns naturally to the 'metaphors of the shop', as Coleridge may be alluding to in his criticism of the 'Jacobin drama' he criticises in *Biographia Literaria*:

'And I hope here is a play fitted.' ( I ii 60)

When they actually perform the play it is the mechanics of writing and performance which they fail to master. The punctuation and pauses, the cues and separation of the speaking parts, and the meaning and order of words. They fail grammatically, and the failure is mercilessly pointed out by their critics; the audience who are seemingly so superior to their errors having forgotten the comedy provided

by their own errors of judgement to the wider audience in the theatre. But in terms of their imagery they are woefully limited in their discretion. Bottom's final speech is an example of poetry composed to a particular tradesman's fancy:

O Fates, come, come!

Cut thread and thrum:

Quail, crush, conclude, and quell.<sup>204</sup>

Coleridge points out the requirements or rules of 'taste' by which a poet is to regulate his own style in opposition to Wordsworth's declaration in the Preface of 1802 that in passionate utterance, and in contrast to the voluntary and uniform control of rhyme and metre which distinguishes it from prose, the reader is 'utterly at the mercy of the poet in respect of what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion.' Referring to Wordsworth's 'supposed' determination to write in the language of the rustic, Coleridge, asking what those principles of taste may be 'if he do not adhere closely to the sort and order of words which he hears in the market, wake, high road or plough field,' replies:

by principles, the ignorance or neglect of which would convict him of being no *poet*, but a silly or ignorant usurper of the name! By the principles of grammar, logic, psychology! In one word such a knowledge of the facts, material and spiritual, that most appertain to his art, as if it have been governed and applied by *good sense*, and rendered instinctive by habit, becomes the representative and reward of our past conscious reasonings, insights, and conclusions, and acquires the name of TASTE<sup>205</sup>.

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<sup>204</sup> *MND* V i 274-76.

<sup>205</sup> *BL* II 81.



The mechanicals are thoroughly methodical it seems in their preparations for the rehearsal, but they have only missed out one thing. The imagination which ought to have prepared them for the errors which the emotions of fear and fright, as well as overweening ambition, may cause in the actual performance of all things. In terms of Theseus's speech the 'palpable, gross play' of the mechanicals lacks the imagination which would give it a finer and subtler form, but it can be salvaged by the imagination of the spectator. 'The best in these are but shadows and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them..' (V i 208-09). In this context Hermia's words that 'things base and vile holding no quantity' are transformed by love is relativised to make aesthetic judgements turn on the imagination of the audience, reader or spectator. The same kind of 'love' which Wordsworth demands from the reader of the poet Burn's works in *A Poet's Epitaph*, 'And you must love him, ere to you/He will seem worthy of your love' (43-44), is demanded of the audience in order to show a respect which is not forthcoming from the play's actual audience in the play. Wordsworth's similar call for the imagination to take an active part in the reading of his apparently trivial poetry, as well as demanding thought, has affinities with this comic interlude's quieter reflections.

##### **5. Bottom, Luther, Coleridge and the vernacular.**

Bottom's misquotation of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians is only one example of the way in which the Bible is given over to possible mistranslation by the laity after they were left partly to their own devices, and the promptings of conscience, in their interpretation of difficult texts. The consequences of that reforming textual revolution for political and religious life, as well as for the prestige of vernacular languages as a vehicle for transmitting religious, cultural and political ideas, and eventually a more liberal pursuit of scientific knowledge have been well

documented.<sup>206</sup> But it is Coleridge's perspective on that process of vernacularisation and its relation to national literature which I wish to focus on for the moment. I hope to show that the distinction between interpreting a word or text imaginatively as opposed to fancifully, or literally by producing a picture of something, can produce doctrinal error or absurdity.

When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German he gave a new language to his country which was steeped in the spiritual and imaginative forms of the East, yet written in the vernacular of his country, and he made his 'satan' a literal Gothic devil. Coleridge's account of his study of German literature while he was in Germany, as recorded in *Biographia Literaria*, is an outline history of the translation of texts which then transformed the literature and language of Germany. Beginning with his reading through Ottfried's metrical paraphrase of the Gospels during the transitional state of the Teutonic language from the Gothic to the old German of the Swabian period, Coleridge then read the Minnesinger (or poets of love) and the Provencal derived metrical romances, followed by 'their degenerate successors' the 'master singers,' but he states that in the translation of the Bible modern German began to flourish:

In Luther's own German writings, and eminently in his translation of the Bible, the German language commenced. I mean the language as it is at present written; that which is called the High German, as contradistinguished from the Platt- Teutsch, the dialect of the flat or northern countries, and from the Ober- Teutsch, the language of the middle and southern Germany. The High German is indeed a *lingua communis*, not actually the native language of any

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<sup>206</sup> For an overview of this history see John F. A. Sawyer, *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*, Blackwell Companions to Religion. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

province, but the choice and fragrancy of all the  
dialects. From this cause it is at once the most copious  
and the most grammatical of all the European  
tongues.<sup>207</sup>

The poetry of Luther's contemporary Hans Sachs, the Cobbler of Nuremburg was a source of pleasure for Coleridge, albeit that he was a cobbler, amongst many great writers whom Coleridge claims have been similarly cobblers or tradesmen. I hope I have given some indication of why the tradesman would be an important element of the narrative, but it is pertinent to consider here, why Coleridge should want to include this fact about Sachs, and what that may have meant to his readers, especially readers of Shakespeare. Coleridge may be remembering Thomas Rymer's criticism of Shakespeare in *A Short View of Tragedy* (London, 1693) in which he condemns his use of low life characters and comedy in tragedy, putting this down to his using inappropriate models, thus violating literary decorum.<sup>208</sup>

These Carpenters and Cobblers [authors of the Medieval pageant cycles] were the guides he followed—And it is no wonder that we find so much farce and *Apocryphal Matter* in his tragedies. Thereby un-hallowing the Theatre, profaning the name of tragedy, and instead of representing men and manners, turning all Morality, good sense, and humanity into mockery and derision.<sup>209</sup>

The mystery plays were morality plays themselves, and were more directly religious in their content. Shakespeare's reliance on the mechanicals to provide the entertainment for the weddings feast in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* actually

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<sup>207</sup> BL I 210.

<sup>208</sup> The seventeenth-and eighteenth-century practice of improving Shakespeare by adapting his plays for a more polished and enlightened age was influenced, as so much post-restoration art and literature was, by French classicism and a return to Aristotelian rules of tragedy. Colley Cibber's adaptations were among the most popular, and Nathum Tate's happy ending to King Lear the most outrageous.

<sup>209</sup> David Wheeler, "Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of Shakespeare and the Example of John Dennis," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.4 (1985).

presents the 'Pyramus and Thisbe' interlude in that form of amateurish production, with precisely that kind of 'hard handed men' as its producers and actors. A recent critic argues that Shakespeare's use of the morality and mystery plays is far more important than has hitherto been recognised though, and demonstrates just how closely Shakespeare follows some of these in plays such as *King Lear*, where the horrors of, for example, Gloucester's blinding is in keeping with the explicitly graphic depiction of the suffering human body in the passion plays performed in Coventry near to Shakespeare's own home in Stratford.<sup>210</sup>

Rymer's morally outraged criticism of Shakespeare, himself a tradesman of sorts as the son of a glove maker, did not go without its responses by the editors of Shakespeare who followed him, and by dramatists such as Dryden, Dennis and others who were all imitating and adapting Shakespeare's plays to fit current critical theories and the more 'polished' taste of the times. David Wheeler's essay on these eighteenth-century adaptations reveals an affinity with Wordsworth in Pope's metaphor for finally establishing what kind of work Shakespeare's was, given that his earlier comment that the rules by which we are to judge him, those of 'nature and common sense' were, as Wheeler comments, 'uncodified' and so like other critics he 'had to resort to an elaborate but vague metaphor:'

I will conclude by saying of Shakespear, that with all  
his faults, and with all the irregularity of his Drama, one  
may look upon his works, in comparison with those that  
are more finish'd and regular, as upon an ancient  
majestick piece of Gothick Architecture, compar'd with  
a neat Modern building: The latter is more elegant and

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<sup>210</sup> Beatrice Groves, "'Now Wole I a Newe Game Begynne': Staging Suffering in *King Lear*, the Mystery Plays and Grotius's *Christus Patiens*.(Articles)," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* (2007). 136 This emphasis on the suffering of the body in the plays is picked up by Wordsworth but not staged as such. He is more interested in showing the suffering of the mind, but he did not entirely ignore physical suffering.

glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn.  
It must be allow'd that in one of these there are  
materials enough to make many of the other. It has  
much the greater variety, and much the nobler  
apartments; tho' we are often conducted to them by  
dark, odd, and uncouth Passages. Nor does the Whole  
fail to strike us with greater reverence, tho' many of the  
Parts are childish, ill-plac'd, and unequal to its  
grandeur.<sup>211</sup>

As Wheeler comments 'Pope's use of an architectural metaphor here is no accident (we find a similar one opening Theobald's Preface); for, given their available critical apparatus, these critics were simply accustomed to speaking in structural terms.'

Neo-classicist critic-poets like Dryden and Dennis who adapted Shakespeare could therefore be said to 'take the majestic raw materials Shakespeare provided, and use them to erect a neat modern building.'<sup>212</sup>

The development of Shakespeare criticism and adaptation therefore went hand in hand with the neo-classical taste which had been imported from France, and like the changes in poetic diction noted earlier, produced what Wordsworth saw as an inundation similar to that of contemporary German poetry, which was destroying not only the spirit of Milton and Shakespeare but could be said to be undermining traditional Christian doctrine. The Gothic cathedral in its heterogeneity and inclusiveness, using natural 'organic' forms, highly sophisticated building techniques, and fancifully grotesque Northern figures had celebrated this imaginative synthesis of mathematics and geometry, natural resources, art and religious devotion, to construct a synthesis which produced the great monumental, and towering, structures of faith. In

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<sup>211</sup> Quoted in Wheeler, "Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of Shakespeare and the Example of John Dennis." 442. Pope, in William Warburton, Preface to *The Works of Shakespeare* (London, 1747; rpt New York: AMS Press, 1968) I, xlv-xlvi.

<sup>212</sup> Wheeler, (1985), 442.

one sense a truly ‘constructive’ philosophy, which Coleridge envisages in opposition to, or as the completion of the dynamic philosophy of Schelling. A purely dynamic philosophy which utilises the polar philosophy of Giordano Bruno, Spinoza and the more obtruse philosophy of Plotinus rather than that of Plato would rely on the one substance of God and Nature, or the identity of subject and object, a pantheism which Coleridge objected to. A constructive philosophy however, might actually be more inclusive, and admit its shadows as well as substances to be realised in a structure which has body as well as theoretical grounding. Without it the great Gothic Cathedral will totter and the ‘winding steps’ of its ‘ruined tower’ have no supporting structure to hold it up.<sup>213</sup>

The link between Wordsworth’s wished for image of his completed oeuvre and Rymer’s criticism, Pope’s reply and Coleridge’s outline history of literature and translation in Germany, can be read then as leading up to his translation of Schelling and the interruption of the disquisition on imagination by the ‘letter from a friend’ in chapter XIII. In its chilliness and alternately glimpsed flashes of coloured lights and gloom, this resonates with the imagery of and refers particularly to the Gothic cathedral, as metaphor for the imagination and its functioning in the support of religious faith. What is perhaps not recognised is that it is imagination and fancy combined which produces the Gothic Cathedral. The ‘modern chapels of ease’ which Coleridge’s friend compares the Cathedral to are then like the polished and refined classical couplets of Pope, lacking the wildness and sublimity, the chill and terror of the Gothic Cathedral, but also lacking something which is referred to by the literary man of letters as that which guards the high altar in all the Cathedrals, the symbol of the cross. The grotesques are the dwarves like Milton, who only appeared to be

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<sup>213</sup> This is the image used in the ‘letter from a friend,’ which describes his reaction to reading the missing, purely theoretical, philosophical chapter on the imagination. *BL* I 303.

dwarves because they were so far ahead of their rivals in imaginative vision, but whose commitment to the ‘peculiar doctrines’ of Christianity was in the heart, not the head.<sup>214</sup>

Coleridge characterises the hundred years which followed Luther’s translation as an ‘age of pedantic barbarisms’ in which the combination of Latin and German in which the books were composed was reflected in the strange typography. That era looked forward to the age of Dryden and what Coleridge describes as the flowering of German literature in the works of Voss and Garve who took their own stylistic models from Percy’s *Reliques of English Poesy*.<sup>215</sup>

In ‘Satyrane’s Letters’ in *Biographia*, Coleridge recounts Wordsworth and Coleridge’s first hand knowledge of the poet Klopstock’s use of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* when composing his *Messiah* during their meeting with the poet as recorded in Wordsworth’s journal. By way of translation, and using what was to become known as the German hexameter, and transformation into epic poetry, a small part of the book of Genesis has evolved through several linguistic transformations until, as Wordsworth thought then, we are brought to a consideration of the result of that process in a ‘very *German* Milton.’<sup>216</sup> The reason Coleridge chooses to include this reference to Klopstock’s initial denial that he had used Milton’s poem as the foundation of his own, may be related to his own perplexed reaction to Wordsworth’s claims in the 1815 edition of his poems that he is an original poet, giving the impression, consciously or not, that he has not relied on other poets’ work in his own poems. Coleridge also responded to the recognition given in the *Essay Supplementary*

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<sup>214</sup> BL I 37. In chapter two, Milton is described as not being ‘irritated’ or angered by criticism of his poetry, as Wordsworth appeared most vociferously to be in The Preface of 1815.

<sup>215</sup> Thomas Percy, *Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 2 vols. (London; New York: Dent, Dutton, 1906).

<sup>216</sup> BL II 206.

to the *Preface* to the Germans as the first rightly to understand Shakespeare, thereby slighting Coleridge's lectures and the two poets' own earlier interpretations and use of Shakespeare. Wordsworth's praise of the German critics is an about-face of sorts, which welcomes the criticism as fulsomely as he resented the 'deluges of sickly German tragedies' in the 1800 Preface.

The foreignising process which one form of translation involves is a 'making strange' of the kind which I touched on at the end of chapter one, in alluding to Wordsworth's fear of the inundation of the national literature by foreign texts and mores. But the corollary of this is the making 'strange' of the familiar and everyday which imagination produces. In his notes dictated to Isabella Fenwick on his share of the work in *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth is recorded as saying:

The Ancient Mariner' grew and grew till it became too important for our first object, which was limited to our expectation of five pounds, and we began to talk of a Volume, which was to consist, as Mr Coleridge has told the world, of Poems chiefly on natural subjects taken from common life, but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium. Accordingly I wrote 'The Idiot Boy', 'Her Eyes are Wild, etc.', 'We are Seven', 'The Thorn', and some others.<sup>217</sup>

Coleridge's more considered version in *Biographia* is also more detailed, and makes the distinction between his poetry of the supernatural and Wordsworth's of the 'ordinary' more clearly, using a style less prosaic than in Wordsworth's account. Coleridge also makes a distinction between idea, plan, and hopeful prosecution, which makes the 'thought' the origin of the plan of writing a 'series' of poems on incidents and agents supernatural, together with 'subjects from ordinary life, the characters and

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<sup>217</sup> Quoted in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*. (Longman, 1992) 369



incidents [were] to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves.’

In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed towards persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.<sup>218</sup>

What Coleridge's prose brings in to play here are the notions of wonder — that of the treasures of the world of nature, —and of the reason why it no longer appears wonderful to eyes and ears that have become accustomed to its ordinariness. The lyrical tones in which appreciation of this inexhaustible ‘treasure’ is voiced, finishes with an echo of Isaiah<sup>219</sup> and by way of that book's transmission and translation, of St Paul:

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<sup>218</sup> Mason, (1992), 366. *BL* II 14-15.

<sup>219</sup> Isaiah 35:5-6, Jeremiah 9:5, Matthew 13:11-17.

9. But as it is written Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,  
neither have entered into the heart of man, the things  
which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10. But God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit; for  
the spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of  
God.<sup>220</sup>

The process of translation which brought these Biblical forms to a readership of English (and German) laity, also delivered up to religious controversy textual interpretations which, as in our critical interpretations of what Wordsworth and Coleridge actually wished to convey above, were to be the source of dispute over the next few centuries. If we were to read what Coleridge writes in the above passage from *Biographia* in terms of the ‘spirit’ of which Paul speaks, we might be nearer to understanding what the imagination is capable of discerning which the eyes of the worldly cannot see, hear or feel because of ‘selfish solicitude,’ hardness of heart, and a timid prudence.

Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians relate to issues of division within the Christian community in Corinth. The issues which divide it, apart from the that of the authority of Paul as a teacher, are those of language, judgement and the law, marriage, all of which are framed within a cultural emphasis on the differences between the philosophical wisdom of the Greeks and the ‘foolish’ wisdom of Christ. The difficulty posed by the kind of ‘translation’ required in order to teach the word of the Gospel to the Greeks of Corinth is that which all inter-lingual communicative language presents; the teacher is faced with a cultural and linguistic divide for which different talents would be required in order to spread the word as well as the spirit of an original source. When Paul writes that of all the gifts of the spirit — of tongues,

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<sup>220</sup> I Corinthians 2: 9-10.

interpretation, prophecy, teaching, healing, — needful as they are, there is yet a ‘better way’; he names faith, hope and charity among the gifts of the spirit to be coveted, but it is charity which should be cherished above all:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, I  
am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the *gift of prophecy*, and understand  
all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all  
faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not  
charity, I am nothing.<sup>221</sup>

In the same letter he writes of the problem which speaking in ‘tongues’ or ‘in the spirit’ entails. When the followers of Christ ‘speak in tongues’, there is no communication or teaching:

He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself;  
but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that  
ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied;  
for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh  
with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may  
receive edifying.

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy  
to be understood, how shall it be known what is  
spoken? For ye shall speak unto the air.

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the  
world, none of them *is* without signification.<sup>222</sup>

This discussion of Paul would appear to have taken my argument some way from *Lyrical Ballads* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but I've done this in order to return to the problem of poetic diction, and Wordsworth's need to write in a language which not only reflected the lives of, but could be understood by, the middle and

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<sup>221</sup> I Corinthians. 13:1-3.

<sup>222</sup> I Corinthians. 14:10.

lower classes of society, and in the 'language of life' which Horace aspired to in his *Ars Poetica*.<sup>223</sup> Wordsworth uses Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, ch.13, to illustrate what he means by the pure English style he aspires to, in the Preface of 1800, where he compares Prior's version, and Johnson's version of Proverbs, ch.6, 'a hubbub of words,' unfavourably with the original as it exists 'in our common translation.'<sup>224</sup> I hope to show that the connection is not remote but essential to the poetry. *Lyrical Ballads* was meant from its inception to be a 'popular' work judging by the responses of Wordsworth and of Dorothy Wordsworth to the sale of the first edition:

From what I can gather *The Ancient Mariner* has upon the whole been an injury to the volume, I mean that the old words and the strangeness of it have deterred readers from going on. If the volume should come to a second edition I should put in its place some little things which would be more likely to suit the common taste.<sup>225</sup>

Wordsworth did not mean to confine his readers to those of the lower orders, however. We have seen that he sent letters to persons 'of eminence' in order to bring the poetry to their notice, and he hoped that if they approved and the poems sold well that he could in future command his price from the booksellers. These letters confirm Wordsworth's earliest conviction that he felt himself to be a common labourer in the same vineyard as William Wilberforce and Charles Fox, as well as Coleridge, as he declaims in *The Prelude*.<sup>226</sup> In his letter to Wilberforce Wordsworth states that he

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<sup>223</sup> Wordsworth's letter to an unknown person in 1800, one of those 'persons of eminence' to whom he sent copies of the volumes, cites Horace on using the 'language of life.' There is a possibility that this might have been Tytler, as it was discovered at a bookseller's in Edinburgh. See editor's note. William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, Chester L. Shaver, Mary Moorman, Alan G. Hill and Ernest De Selincourt, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1967). [vol. 8] 12.

<sup>224</sup> LB Butler and Green, 763. Our common translation is the King James Bible.

<sup>225</sup> Wordsworth to Joseph Cottle. *EY*. 264.

<sup>226</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XIII 431-52.

considers the book Wilberforce had recently published and his own poetry were working towards the same ends. The letter refers to Wordsworth's intentions in writing *Lyrical Ballads* to take as his subject 'the affections which walk in silence and in a veil' and his

determination to prefer passion to imagery and (except where chosen for dramatic purposes) to express what I meant to express with all possible precision and propriety but with very little attention to what is called dignity.<sup>227</sup>

The one common truth which Wordsworth feels he and Wilberforce were both acting under is the central Christian doctrine of practising Christian charity rather than simply professing it and hypocritically assuming Christian faith in God was all that was required. In attacking Unitarianism and the Quakers for their commercial spirit and the ease with which they could assume that they were fulfilling Christian tenets simply by attending their churches or meeting houses, Wilberforce calls for a practical Christianity which is active in its charity, but which also returns to the 'peculiar doctrines' of the Christian faith. He argues that these doctrines are not shaken by speculation or discursive reasoning because they have their validity in the emotional truth to experience which they convey. The main argument is directed against the new sects which take reason as their guide in all doctrinal matters, and prudence in matters of benevolence. His main targets are the Unitarians and Quakers. He especially disputes the Unitarians' claim to be Christians.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> EY 684. Published in CL II 666.

<sup>228</sup> William Wilberforce. A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity. By William Wilberforce, ... The second edition London, 1797. Based on information from *English Short Title Catalogue. Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> Accessed 7th March 2008.

True love is an ardent, and an active principle, a cold, a dormant, a phlegmatic gratitude, are contradictions in terms...How gladly do we seize upon any opportunity of rendering to him, or those who are dear to him, any little good offices, which though of themselves of small intrinsic worth, may testify the sincerity of our thankfulness.<sup>229</sup>

The passage at the end of *The Prelude* refers particularly to the prophetic and didactic nature of Wordsworth and Coleridge's mission, and with Paul's letter to the Corinthians in mind it could be said that the 'voices' Wordsworth refers to at the end of the poem are voices which he also wishes to 'interpret' for others. The need for prophecy (knowledge or wisdom), interpretation, and the teaching of faith, hope, and charity, but the human heart and love above all, are all aspects of the Pauline doctrines which Wordsworth could as easily have learned from his Bible, as from his own experience of the failure of the French Revolution with which this passage is so often linked through Coleridge's letter to Wordsworth of 1800.<sup>230</sup>

Then, though too weak to tread the ways of truth,  
This age fall back to old idolatry,  
Though men return to servitude as fast  
As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame  
By nations sink together, we shall still  
Find solace in the knowledge we have,  
Blessed with true happiness if we may be  
United helpers forward of a day

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 69-70.

<sup>230</sup> 'I wish you would write a poem in blank verse, addressed to those who in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*.' *CL* I 527.

Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work—  
Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe—  
Of their redemption, surely yet to come.  
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak  
A lasting inspiration, sanctified  
By reason and by truth; what we have loved  
Others will love, and we may teach them how:  
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes  
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth  
On which he dwells, above this frame of things  
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes  
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)  
In beauty exalted, as it is itself  
Of substance and of fabric more divine.<sup>231</sup>

Wordsworth's great poem begins with recollections of a childhood steeped in liberty and freedom in which beauty and fear, foster the boy's imagination and strengthen his ability to face the challenges of life ahead.

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<sup>231</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XIII 431-452.

## Chapter 5. Imitation and Transposition: The Transformative Poetics of *Lyrical Ballads*

### 1. '—Not with a waste of words'

Wordsworth's 'pastoral' poem *Michael* is one on which he spent a great deal of time. The above line comes from an unpublished 'expansion' to the poem which he had considered inserting to justify the description of the aged lamp which had 'become famous in its neighbourhood/And was a public symbol in the vale'. Writing to Thomas Poole, in order to advise him of a printer's blunder, Wordsworth comments that he had something of the character of Poole in mind when he composed *Michael*.

<sup>232</sup> More interestingly, he wishes to have Poole's opinion on whether further lines which touch on the style of the language used by the shepherd, or the kind of thoughts the old man had, are such that a small land holder in his own area could have used or entertained. The connotations of the word 'waste' in the context of the poem's insistence on Michael's industriousness, frugality and foresight, are such that we might consider other kinds of language a 'waste of words.' Wordsworth thought Michael might occasionally use language clothed in imagery

Lively and beautiful, in rural forms  
That made their conversation fresh and fair  
As is a landscape...

Or that he might occasionally use language less 'fresh and fair', but more fanciful:

Discoursing on remote imaginations, strong  
Conceits, devices, day-dreams, thoughts and schemes,  
The fancies of a solitary man!

Michael does not use this language in the poem, but the reasons for Wordsworth's hesitation may be clarified when I consider further the literary character Michael is based on.

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<sup>232</sup> EY 322-24



The poem itself appears to have cost Wordsworth much trouble, vexatious rewriting and doubt, both during composition, according to Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal, and immediately after the poem had been published.<sup>233</sup> The blank verse poem may have been planned initially as a ballad, similar to other poems in *Lyrical Ballads*. There is some evidence for this in the manuscript fragments of 'Ballad Michael'<sup>234</sup>.

The second volume which Wordsworth produced for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* should have contained contributions from Coleridge, including *Christabel*, which had already been sent, uncompleted, to the printers, but by early October 1800 it had been decided that *Christabel*, would not be published and, therefore, a new poem of some length was needed to fill the empty space.

Wordsworth worked on the poem intermittently, expending much effort on it, which appears to have drained him so much that he became ill. The published poem, however, has left unresolved questions frequently debated by critics, including that of its genre, its teasing reference to a 'second self' for whom Wordsworth writes the poem, and the relationship of many manuscript fragments to the poem. I will be referring to some of these issues in this thesis, but the large body of fine critical work which the poem has produced will have to go largely untapped here, as my focus is mainly on the poem as an example of intertextuality, or more properly, transformation. I will be looking at the poem together with 'The Last of The Flock,' with which it is often paired in criticism.

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<sup>233</sup> See Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth: The Alfoxden Journal, 1798; The Grasmere Journals, 1800 -1803 with an Introduction by Helen Darbishire*, ed. Mary Moorman, New ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971). Between 11<sup>th</sup> October, the date on which Wordsworth decided not to include *Christabel*, and 9th December William is described as working unsuccessfully or 'in vain' on the poem which she calls 'the sheepfold.' Its 'composition,' as Dorothy repeatedly writes, did not come easily to him.

<sup>234</sup> See *LB Butler and Green*, 600-01. Robert Woof, Jonathan Wordsworth, and Stephen Parrish conducted a lively and contentious debate on the relationship of the ballad to 'Michael' in the early seventies. See Stephen Parrish, "'Michael', Mr. Woof and Mr. Wordsworth," *Ariel* 3.2 (1972). R. S. Woof, "John Stoddart, 'Michael' and *Lyrical Ballads*," *Ariel* 1.2 (1970). Jonathan Wordsworth, "A Note on the Ballad Version of 'Michael'," *Ariel* 2.2 (1971).

My own key to some of the poem's puzzles is via Shakespeare, and particularly *Richard II*, which can be read as the narrative source of *Michael*, allowing us to recognise transformed elements of the play in the poem, with the shepherd Michael as a transformation of the character of John of Gaunt. The way that Wordsworth handled this 'version' of the play not only tells us something more about the poem, it gives us an insight into Wordsworth's reading of Shakespeare. The poem is also a crucial document in the history of Wordsworth's aesthetics, since it was the only one written immediately after the writing of the Preface of 1800, as Kenneth Johnston points out:

*Michael* is the conclusive poem of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* in every sense...*Michael* is the only poem in the entire collection to have been written to a previously enunciated model...It fulfils, particularly, Wordsworth's dictum that, in these poems, unlike most narrative poems, the feeling was to give importance to the action rather than vice versa<sup>235</sup>

It is worth quoting the 1800 Preface in which he also memorably eschews the use of poetic diction, especially of excessive personification:

...in these Poems I propose to myself to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men, and I do not find that such personifications make any regular or natural part of that language. I wish to keep my

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<sup>235</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, "Wordsworth's Self-Creation and the New *Lyrical Ballads*," *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry, Romanticism in Perspective: Text, Cultures, Histories (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave, 2001). 117. Johnston does recognise the importance of community and inheritance to Wordsworth in 'Michael' and sees Wordsworth placing the emphasis in the new poems on how 'pairs or couples as the smallest units in the community can be preserved', 90. I think the emphasis is rather on families than couples, though. In fact the irony in 'Michael' is that Luke is the true guarantor of survival or continuity for the couple, and he is not preserved.

Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded  
that by so doing I shall interest him...<sup>236</sup>

Wordsworth's determination in that Preface to keep his reader 'in the company of flesh and blood' rather than say the 'supernatural' beings of Coleridge's poetry, employs the discourse of seventeenth and eighteenth century translation theory. The actual extended metaphors Wordsworth uses to describe his method, though as ancient as Horace's 'ut pictura poesis' (*Ars Poetica* 361), derive from the painterly imagery used by critics and translators such as Richard Hurd in his essay on literary imitation annexed to his edition of Horace. This is outlined in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English* by Louis Kelly. Kelly points out that the notion of translation as painting in the eighteenth-century is ambiguous: it is sometimes used with respect to the subject matter of the work being translated and sometimes with respect to the author being translated.' Whereas early seventeenth-century translations tended to be 'translator-centred,' after the mid seventeenth century focus on originality the source author was more respected and imitation 'increasingly dropped out of discussion because it was no longer considered to be a kind of translation.'<sup>237</sup>

If imitation had been divorced from translation, this may partly clarify Wordsworth's otherwise curious justifications in the 1815 Essay supplementary to the Preface. The 'powers requisite for the production of poetry,' he asserts, following Richard Hurd's essay very closely here, are 'those of Observation and Description', in displaying which he is to be considered as neither like a translator nor an etcher, 'in a state of subjection to his original' as this supposes 'all the powers of the mind to be merely passive.' Wordsworth goes on to list sensibility, reflection, 'imagination and fancy, to modify, to create, and to associate', as well as invention, 'by which

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<sup>236</sup> LB, Butler and Green, 747.

<sup>237</sup> Louis Kelly, "The Eighteenth Century to Tytler." *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*. Volume 3. 1660-1790, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 68-70.

characters are composed out of materials supplied by observation; whether of the poet's own heart and mind, or of external life and nature.' Finally judgement is needed as to the degree to which each of the former ought to be exerted. 'Characters supplied out of the poet's own heart and mind' are not necessarily characters of his own invention of course, they can equally be remembered from his reading.

Wordsworth is deliberately vague here, and it has generally been assumed that he meant the former rather than the latter. In the same Preface of 1815 we are told that the grand storehouses of the imagination are the Bible, Shakespeare and Milton, and it is from the warehouse of Shakespeare that Wordsworth recommends his readers to source the 'human and dramatic imagination...an inexhaustible source.'<sup>238</sup>

The only capitalised words in the 1800 preface are 'Poet,' 'Poems' and 'Reader,' and it is to the reader that Wordsworth addresses his arguments in his prefaces, not the dominant critical opinion makers.<sup>239</sup> But he may be taken as having a certain kind of reader in mind, pointed out by Hurd, for whom Plato's 'turning mirror' becomes the formulaic aesthetic principle for all reflection and all art.

The spectator is often at a loss ( for the artist himself is not always aware of it) to discern the *original* from the *copy*; to know with certainty, if the *sentiment* or *image*, presented to him, be directly taken from the *life*, or be itself a lively transcript, only, of some former copy. And this difficulty is the greater, because the *original*, as well as the *copy*, is always at hand for the poet to turn

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<sup>238</sup> Wordsworth, Hutchinson and De Selincourt, Wordsworth Poetical Works with Introductions and Notes. 755.

<sup>239</sup> Critics who focus on the reader's role in Wordsworth's poetry include Susan Wolfson, (1986), and in his examination of Wordsworth's creation of an 'inferred reader' as well as an 'implied reader', William H. Galperin, Revision and Authority in Wordsworth: The Interpretation of a Career (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). My own reading suggests that the 'authority' of the self which Wordsworth claims and continually revises, as Galperin shows, should also be seen in terms of an 'other' who is also another author; in the case of the poems examined in this essay, Shakespeare.

to, and we can rarely be certain since both were equally in his power, which of the two he chose to make the object of his own *imitation*.<sup>240</sup>

With the original object itself before his eyes, the imitator of a work may also take in circumstances omitted or overlooked in the common original', and may even 'possess a stronger and more plastic genius, and therefore be able to touch, with more force of expression, even those particulars, which he professedly imitates.

This makes the truly original imitator in Hurd's theory much more of an independent artist, observer, and creator than a mere translator. For Hurd the imagination supplies the outline or form to the poet while the fancy supplies the particular circumstances and local detail which will ensure that his work is no mere slavish copy. Using Shakespeare as one of his exemplars, Hurd argues, for example, that Shakespeare's more vivid image of the dawn, 'standing tip-toe,' while using the same *form* of personification as Virgil and Homer, sets his description apart from theirs. This particularising vision or detail indicates original genius:

...look what streaks

Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:

Night's candles are put out: and JOCUND DAY

STANDS TIPTOE UPON THE MOUNTAINS TOP.

Hurd argues that this may look like an imitation but, whereas the former imitators use a general description,

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<sup>240</sup> Richard Hurd, transl. Horace, *Q. Horatii Flacci epistola ad Pisones, et Augustum; with an English commentary and notes. To which are added two dissertations: the one, on the provinces of the several species of dramatic poetry; the other, on poetical imitation. In two volumes, The second edition, corrected and enlarged.* (Vol 2. London, 1753. 2 vols. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*.) 119-122. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. Accessed 23. May, 2007

Shakespeare is *particular*: that impatience is set before us and pictured to the eye in the circumstances of standing tiptoe... This, it must be owned, is one of the surest characteristics of real genius. And if we find it generally in a writer, we may almost venture to esteem him *original* without further scruple. For the shapes and appearances of things are apprehended only in the gross by dull minds. They think they *see*, but it is through a mist, where if they catch but a faint glimpse of the form before them it is well. More one is not to look for from their clouded imaginations.<sup>241</sup>

Wordsworth's 1798 address to his readers in the advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 continually tries to reassure them that they were not to be confused or perplexed, when they looked for poetry and did not find what they expected in the volumes. Even though they might open his book and ask by 'what species of courtesy' he has not 'copied' art but nature.' He makes this point emphatically in a letter to Charles James Fox in 1800: 'The two poems which I have mentioned ..['Michael' and 'The Brothers'] are faithful copies from nature.'<sup>242</sup> His language and his characters have been observed, he has kept 'his eye steadily' on them, his readers should find themselves, therefore, in the 'company of flesh and blood.' He has not glanced, it appears, at anything artificial. As many critics have shown in Wordsworth's use of Milton and Shakespeare, this is not entirely the case.<sup>243</sup> He does, however, give some indication that his poems are imitations in the 1798 advertisement, but it is often read only in apparent relation to Coleridge's poem:

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 132-33. It is remarkable how close this is to Wordsworth's description of his sighting of shepherds in his childhood or youth, and how he now sees them more clearly. This particularising vision is one contrasted with the misty glory with which he saw them surrounded in his youth.

<sup>242</sup> Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Early Years 1787-1805*. 315.

<sup>243</sup> Amongst others see Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Edwin Stein, *Wordsworth's Art of Allusion* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988)., Robin Jarvis, *Wordsworth, Milton and the Theory of Poetic Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

‘The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, [which] was  
professedly written in imitation of the *style* as well as  
the spirit of our elder poets...’<sup>244</sup>

The other poems in the volume were, though, written in the *spirit* of ‘our elder writers before the revolution,’ The ‘spirit’ or imagination is where he locates his dependence on these writers. The letter of course is distinct from the spirit and is the poet’s particular style. Choosing to reject poetic diction as it is used in contemporary poetry, as well as in those earlier poets, Wordsworth to some extent rejects his poetic forebears in 1798.

The 1800 preface however, is more explicit on his rejection of poetic diction, because he wishes to ‘imitate, and as far as possible to adopt the very language of men.’

...there is I hope in these Poems little falsehood of  
description, and my ideas are expressed in language  
fitted to their respective importance. Something I must  
have gained from this practice, as it is friendly to one  
property of all good poetry, namely good sense; but it  
has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of  
phrases and figures of speech which from father to son  
have long been regarded as the common inheritance of  
Poets.<sup>245</sup>

His voluntary refusal of that particular ‘portion’ of the poet’s inheritance may well apply to the language used, but it does not apply to the content, thought or ‘matter.’ This is a point that Wordsworth clarifies in ‘Personal Themes,’ written around 1803 but not published until 1807, which contains the first statement of his indebtedness to Shakespeare and Spencer, after the publication in *The Morning Post*

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<sup>244</sup> Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1978.

<sup>245</sup> *LB*, Butler and Green, 748.

of his Miltonic Sonnets dedicated to Liberty and Independence. In the sonnet 'It is not to be Thought of that the Flood', it is 'the tongue that Shakespeare spake' and the 'faith and morals' of Milton that are held to have been the glory of a former England, now almost lost to an idolatry of wealth, commercialism and arbitrary power, and struggling to give utterance to any dissent because of the curtailment of free speech imposed by the 'Gagging Acts' of 1795, under a political establishment floundering in the 'bogs and fens' of corruption.

In 'Personal Themes' Wordsworth acknowledges his debts to the books he has read by his own fireside. Written as a denial of his membership of the tribe of poets from whom he wishes to dissociate himself, and whose poetry espouses gossip, 'sprightly malice' and truly personal themes,<sup>246</sup> Wordsworth claims that he already uses Shakespeare and Spenser in his poetry for their 'matter', not their manner.

Dreams, books are each a world; and books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good...  
There find I personal themes, a plenteous store,  
Matter wherein right volu'ble I am,  
To which I listen with a ready ear;  
Two shall be named, pre-eminently dear, —  
The gentle Lady married to the Moor

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<sup>246</sup> The poem may have been written in response to the 1801 publication of John Thelwall's *Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement*, which contains the verse drama *The Fairy of the Lake*. In this Arthurian play, itself an imitation of Dryden's *King Arthur*, Wordsworth and Coleridge are staged as poets who, together with Thelwall, overthrow the incestuously driven powers and Gothic superstition which characterises the literature and politics of the establishment. Wordsworth's mistress Annette Vallon may be read as hinted at in the notes to the play. Coleridge's marital difficulties are also referred to. See John Thelwall, *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement: 1801*, *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989). These personal themes and gossip are what Wordsworth attacks, at the same time denying any literary association with an identifiable sect of poets which Frances Jeffrey called the 'Lake Poets.' See my article 'Coleridge, Wordsworth and Thelwall's *The Fairy of the Lake*.' *The Coleridge Bulletin*. (New Series 28, (NS) Winter 2006) 63-71.



And heavenly Una with her milk-white Lamb.<sup>247</sup>

Amongst Wordsworth's personal themes is the 'plenteous store' which is the 'matter' of Shakespeare. What he meant by personal themes in this context, and of *Michael*, is essentially tied to the concerns he expressed in his letter to Fox and in the 1800 Preface, that during that period of intense divisions along political lines, and the factionalism it produced, given the real threat to independence and liberty posed by invasion, social differences should be subservient to what united the nation.

Wordsworth's determination to speak on behalf of those whose voices were unheard, and his concern that the feelings of the 'person' should be at the centre of his poetry, were not simply put in the service of a narrowly class based political movement, but were meant to influence political, public and private opinion in support of a reform of moral vision, and a vindication of 'the people,' especially the poor. At this time they were increasingly seen only as the potential source of violent revolution, and were excluded from voicing their own concerns, as much by the silencing of radical groups and individuals, poets, and 'philosophers,' as by their own disenfranchisement.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> 'Personal Themes.' Susan Wolfson traces Wordsworth's debt to *Othello* in 'Ruth' and *The Prelude* I, 279-82. Susan J. Wolfson, The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). 71-79. Her focus is on the seductive power which charmed words, eloquence and the attraction of the exotic have over the minds of Desdemona and Ruth, linking this to Wordsworth's distrust of poetic utterance as voiced in the Preface of 1800. There Wordsworth decries the public's 'craving for extraordinary incident' abetted by a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation," and seeking nothing less than "deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." Wolfson pursues this line of reference to Shakespeare only as far as it supports her study of the interrogative character of the poetry. My own research attempts to question why Shakespeare particularly was transformed in this manner, and what questions the reader was to ask. One answer is given by Wordsworth himself in the Preface of 1800 in that he sees the 'deluge' of foreign literature in translation as a threat to public appreciation and imaginative response to Milton and Shakespeare. These are the poets he will emulate or imitate in his poetry, albeit with a different focus.

<sup>248</sup> For discussions of Wordsworth and contemporary politics see among others Nicholas Roe, Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), and E. P. Thompson, The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age, (New York: New Press, 1997).

## 2. Aesthetic and Political Codes: *Richard II* and *Michael*.

To suggest that Wordsworth's *Michael* imitates *Richard II* appears to be a contradiction of Wordsworth's stated aims in the Preface, since the play partly stages in a political sense, the construction of those hierarchically established distinctions, 'the pre-established codes of decision' or precedents which he tells his readers they must put out of their minds if they are to appreciate his poetry. Those codes included, as well as the feudal codes which established the reciprocal allegiances which buttressed the power of the King, the belief that poetry was the province of an educated elite, of the refined, and, as Hazlitt was to write later, was not a suitable vehicle for democratic political reform:

The cause of the people is indeed but little calculated as  
a subject for poetry...The language of poetry naturally  
falls in with the language of power.<sup>249</sup>

To some extent he was right, but he is also the critic who first characterised Wordsworth's muse as a 'levelling' one. Though he does not say it explicitly, he recognises that the main problem in Wordsworth's battle to regenerate and revolutionize English poetry was a veneration of the language of Shakespeare which often went hand in hand with a reverential attitude to arbitrary power. But *Richard II* also stages the overthrow by usurpation of one wielder of arbitrary power who is characterised by his poetic eloquence and is forced to resign his throne because of an inability to act, and an indifference to the needs of his people.

The Victorian critic Walter Pater, writing in 1889, makes an apt comparison between *Richard II* and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>250</sup> Pater's essay,

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<sup>249</sup> Quoted in Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830*. 165.

<sup>250</sup> Walter Pater, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style*, Library ed. (London: Macmillan, 1910). Quoted in William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, ed. Kenneth Muir (New American Library, 1963). 193. Published at the height of the reign of New Criticism, I quote this here

‘Shakespeare’s English Kings,’ picks up the well established notion of the ‘poetic’ character of the man Richard:

The sense of “divine right” in kings is found to act not so much as a secret of power over others, as of infatuation in themselves. And of all those personal gifts the one that never fails him is just that royal utterance, his appreciation of the poetry of his own hapless lot, an eloquent self-pity, inflecting others in spite of themselves, till they too become irresistibly eloquent about him.<sup>251</sup>

Pater goes on to describe Richard’s ‘meek’ undoing of himself in the mirror scene, (itself an emblem of the loss of identity, but also of the shattering of illusions) as like ‘some melodious contending anthem of Handel’s,’ and it is the play’s structural and tonal qualities which Pater’s aesthetic criticism draws upon to make his comparison with Wordsworth:

...*Richard the Second* does, like a musical composition, possess a certain concentration of its parts, a simple continuity, an evenness in execution which are rare in the great dramatist... ..it belongs to a small group of plays where, by happy birth and consistent evolution, dramatic form approaches to something like the unity of a lyrical ballad, a lyric, a song, a single strain of music.<sup>252</sup>

Shakespeare criticism after Pater took some time to pick up the thematics of his musical analogy, but twentieth-century critics, such as Caroline Spurgeon and

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because its inclusion in this edition typifies the new critical approach of the period. Later references are directly from Pater.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. 197-98.



To check time broke in a disordered string  
But for the concord of my state and time,  
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.  
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.(V v 41-49)

Time must also be taken into account, not only in terms of metrical arrangement, but in terms of the historical changes which account for changes in poetic diction, matters which Wordsworth also insists upon in the 1800 Preface. Pater's analogy of the play with a *Lyrical Ballad* is not taken further than the musical theme, but he also asks himself which form we are to account the highest, lyric or dramatic poetry. He gives the palm to the lyric, but he makes an astute comment on the drama that is relevant here, noting the effort necessary on the spectator's part to

...keep the various parts from flying asunder, a sense of imperfect continuity, such as the older criticism vainly sought to obviate by the rule of the dramatic unities. It follows that a play attains artistic perfection just in proportion as it approaches that unity of lyrical effect, as if a song or ballad were still lying at the root of it, all the various expression of the conflict of character and circumstance falling at last into the compass of a single melody, or musical theme.<sup>254</sup>

Coleridge had made similar points in his lectures on Shakespeare, noting that the plots of Shakespeare's plays were often formed from the simplest of tales or ballads, including what he noted, following Warton, as a source for the *The Merchant of Venice* in 'Gernutus the Jew of Venice,' reprinted in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.<sup>255</sup> Coleridge's conception of Shakespeare's transformation of the

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<sup>254</sup> Pater, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style*.203.

<sup>255</sup> Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 5. *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*. II, 326 and n.1.

myth of Troilus and Cressida is a succinct account of what he saw as Shakespeare's, and what I argue is also Wordsworth's 'painterly' approach at this stage of his career, to imitation, translation and transformation.

...I am half inclined to believe, that Shakespeare's main object, or shall I rather say that his ruling impulse was to translate the (poetic) Heroes [of] Paganism into the not less rude but more intellectually vigorous, more *featurely* Warriors of Christian Chivalry, to substantiate the distinct and graceful Profiles or Outlines of the Homeric Epic into the flesh and blood of the Romantic Drama — in short, to give a grand History-piece in the robust style of Albert Durer.—<sup>256</sup>

On the whole though, Wordsworth and Coleridge do not re-write or transform the histories they read by re-making the same characters in more 'featurely' detail. Wordsworth's focus is on the common man, not the noble lord or royal personage. The music he hears is, as Tintern Abbey proclaims, 'the still sad music of humanity.'<sup>257</sup>

### 3. Wordsworth and the Shakespearean Ballad: 'The Last of the Flock'

Though by no means the only model for him, as Mary Jacobus shows in her extensive study of the ballad form and its popularity at the time,<sup>258</sup> Wordsworth's ballads, like Blake's lyrics have been linked with Shakespeare's songs by later critics, notably by Jonathan Bate in *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, where he wonders if Wordsworth's use of Shakespeare's language and themes does

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid II, 378.

<sup>257</sup> See Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity : A Critical Study of Wordsworth's Ruined Cottage, Incorporating Texts from a Manuscript of 1799-1800*.

<sup>258</sup> For Wordsworth's experiments with the traditional ballad form see Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (1798). For the argument that the poems are experiments in dramatic technique see Stephen Maxfield Parrish, *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

not constitute a shift of focus where the marginalised characters of the plays are given centre stage:

It is as if Shakespeare has been rewritten with his  
shepherds and servants as central rather than as  
secondary characters.<sup>259</sup>

Bate's 1986 study of Shakespeare in the English Romantic poets concentrates mainly on their use of Shakespeare's language as quotation, or on allusions to the plays as signposts to a Shakespearean presence in the individual poet's consciousness. The importance of Shakespeare to the English romantics is mainly seen not as a threat, or as rivalry in the sense of Harold Bloom's 'strong precursor' poet of *The Anxiety of Influence*,<sup>260</sup> but as a 'ghostly substitute father figure'<sup>261</sup> in Wordsworth's case, for example, or as a strong 'presider' in Keats' poetry.

Bate's reference to Wordsworth's letter to Charles James Fox, informing him that the poems *The Brothers* and *Michael* were written 'with a view to showing that men who do not wear fine clothes can feel deeply',<sup>262</sup> is, as he acknowledges, much closer to Wordsworth's intentions in his appropriation of Shakespeare. After noting Wordsworth's echoing of 'Dido with a willow in her hand' which features in the lyrical scene that opens the fifth act of *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Two April 'Mornings'* where the poet remembers Matthew, standing 'with a bough of wilding in his hand,' Bate comments:

The implicit comparisons give Matthew, the village  
schoolmaster, the dignity of the regal characters of  
tragedy and mythology. Allusion enables Wordsworth

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<sup>259</sup> Bate, (1986), 100

<sup>260</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>261</sup> Bate, (1986), 116.

<sup>262</sup> Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Early Years 1787-1805*.312.

to show that in his poetry the ordinary man has taken  
the place of the high born characters that traditionally  
people the higher poetic genres.<sup>263</sup>

Bate also cites Hazlitt's comment on *Lyrical Ballads* partaking of the  
revolutionary 'spirit of the age,' noting that these 'substitutions' denoted a 'political  
and revolutionary act' by which "kings and queens were dethroned from their rank  
and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated  
elsewhere."<sup>264</sup> Hazlitt's comments come from one who was, as it were, in on the  
ground floor of *Lyrical Ballads*, still then in manuscript form, when he first met  
Wordsworth and Coleridge together, as recounted in *My First Acquaintance with  
Poets*.<sup>265</sup> Hazlitt's characterisation of Wordsworth and Coleridge, as with the other  
'portraits' he paints, takes much of its force from implicit parallels with Shakespeare's  
characters or is, typically of Hazlitt and the age, peppered with quotations from the  
plays.<sup>266</sup>

With regard to shepherds and servants taking centre stage, Bate is right in the  
case of many of the lyrics in the 1798 edition of the poems, but in the 1800 poem  
*Michael* Wordsworth presents a more fully developed character and a narrative  
structure which is more complex and subtle. Wordsworth's attempt to explain the  
superstitious 'character' of the narrator of 'The Thorn' because he was a sea captain,  
and his negative comments on 'The Ancient Mariner's' passiveness, and his lack of a  
distinct character based on his 'profession as a sailor' is a consequence of his  
developing sense of identity and character as being closely tied to the role or

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<sup>263</sup> Bate, (1986), 100.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>265</sup> Reprinted in William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or, Contemporary Portraits: And 'My First Acquaintance with Poets'*, ed. Robert Woof (Grasmere, Cumbria: The Wordsworth Trust, 2004). 60-85.

<sup>266</sup> For Hazlitt's use of Shakespearean quotation see Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730 -1830*. 185-201.



occupation of the subject.<sup>267</sup> This belated criticism of Coleridge's poem may be a consequence of Wordsworth's developing sense of the difference between manners and character as suggested by his letter to Coleridge on Burn's poetry while he was in Germany, but may also be an ironic pointer to the distinction between fancy and imagination which the note refers to. The narrator of 'The Thorn' has a strong imagination but no fancy,

The mariner seems to have a fanciful mind which 'laboriously' accumulates images much in the manner of a man in a distinctly unhealthy state of association. Diseases of the volition or forms of insanity, were the subject of much of Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*, which Wordsworth borrowed for his 'facts' relating to 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill.' When retitling his poem 'A Poet's Reverie,' Coleridge takes the term from Darwin's book where it denotes a form of insanity.<sup>268</sup>

Bate is particularly intrigued by links between characters in the tragedies and Wordsworth's poetry, citing Lear carrying Cordelia, for example, as one possible source for the image of the weeping shepherd in the 'The Last of the Flock'. I would place the shepherd, however, closer to Shylock, and *The Merchant of Venice*. The ballad can be linked thematically with the play through their mutual staging of the intermingling with personal identity, and thereby perceived social worth, of economic, social, legal, and blood 'bonds'; most insistently in the shepherd's doleful claim that the gradual loss of his flock took the life-blood from his heart. In the play the heart is so intimately linked with money, that the blood drops which Portia demands should

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<sup>267</sup> See Wordsworth's preface to the 1800 edition. His reading of *Othello*, whose 'occupation' is his perceived identity and his engagement with this aspect of the play in *The Borderers* may have been behind this apparent slighting of Coleridge's poem.

<sup>268</sup> The editors of the Cornell edition note the frequent use of terms from Darwin's *Zoonomia* in *Lyrical Ballads*, especially the use of 'reverie' as a discarded title for 'Strange fits of Passion,' and as a source for the 'Lucy' poems in Kent Beyette, "Wordsworth's Medical Muse: Erasmus Darwin and Psychology in 'Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known.'" *Literature and Psychology* 23 (1973). 93-101. *LB*, Butler and Green, 383.

not be spilled if Shylock exacts his bond, have already been symbolically shed in the sundering of flesh and blood which is Jessica's betrayal of her father, and the denial of Shylock's humanity by Antonio's treatment of him. Wordsworth's shepherd's heart is tied to his flock as much as, if not more than, to his children. Darwin's claim that the responsibilities of children and family life ought to act as a safeguard against the excesses of diseased volition or insanity is qualified by his diagnosis of incurable insanity if these distractions did not manage to alleviate the disease.

Another still! And still another!

A little lamb and then its mother!

It was a vein that never stopped –

Like blood drops from my heart they dropped

The shepherd's belief that as his flock grew so did his love for his children, and that its loss diminished that love, could be an example of what Clive Scott, a modern poet and translator, calls a 'reversed shot' translation of Shylock's apparent equal valuation of his daughter with his stolen ducats. Scott's term is used in a chapter in his *Translating Baudelaire* which 'examines the possibilities of '

re-authoring 'the ST [source text] by shifting the position of the presiding consciousness from outside to inside the text, and from poet ('shot') to subject (reversed shot).<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Clive Scott, *Translating Baudelaire* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000). This is an interesting use of terms, in which the old use of the word subject is used in contradistinction to the usage taken up by the German philosophers Kant, Schelling, and Fichte, where the object is that perceived and the subject the perceiver. 'Duns Scotus (c 1265-c 1308) introduced the antithesis into Scholastic thought: *subjectivum* applied to the "subject of judgements (i.e. the actual object of thought), whereas *objectivum* meant "the thing as constituted through the perceiving mind"....Historians of thought assume that the reversal of the older antithesis is the product of German idealism culminating in Kant's premise, in which 'I think' has transcendental significance and is the a priori condition of all knowledge; and that the new distinction was imported into English by Coleridge and later Hamilton. But this is true only so far as the specifically Kantian implications are concerned. Like the reversal in the older distinctions between fancy and imagination, it first took place in England and reflected the heavier stress on the 'subjective' (in the modern sense) by British empirical psychology, with which all

What I would like to do here is to test that thesis somewhat in the case of what can be read as Wordsworth's 'reverse shot' of the scene in which Shylock is described as running like a mad-man through the streets of Venice after discovering Jessica's elopement and her theft of his money. Shylock's apparent madness is dramatically staged in the play in his *reported* outrageous behaviour:

‘My daughter! O my duckets! O my daughter!’ (*MV* II  
viii, 15).

His distraction is witnessed in the streets of Venice and described by the anti-Semitic Solanio as something entirely foreign and alien: ‘I never heard a passion so confus’d, / So strange, outrageous, and so variable / As the dog Jew did utter in the streets.’ (II viii, 12-14). Wordsworth's poem begins in equally bemused fashion, but his first narrator, whose role here too is as eye-witness and commentator on the ‘fact’ that this scene is not one he has ‘often’ seen elsewhere, is keen to stress, however, that his is no ‘alien’ story.<sup>270</sup>

In distant countries I have been,  
And yet I have not often seen,  
A healthy Man, a Man full grown,  
Weep in the public roads alone.  
But such a one on English ground,  
And in the broad highway, I met;  
Along the broad highway he came,

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the Germans were acquainted. So in 1725 in his widely used textbook *Logick* (II ii 8). Isaac Watts defines the objective as “true in itself” and the “subjective” as our reaction: “The one is in things the other in our minds.” (8th ed 1745. p. 150) Coleridge was well aware of the switch in the meaning of the two terms. In his marginalia to Heinrich Steffens he writes “Steffens has needlessly perplexed his reasoning by his strange use of Subjective and objective—his S = the O of former philosophers, and his O = their S.” (*CM*.IV).’ Noted in *BL* I 172-3.n 3.

<sup>270</sup> For an interesting presentation of the role of the stranger and the alien in the civic economy of Shakespeare's London as staged in the plays see John Michael Archer, *Citizen Shakespeare: Freeman and Aliens in the Language of the Plays*, Early Modern Cultural Studies. (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005).

His cheeks with tears were wet,  
Sturdy he seemed, though he was sad,  
And in his arms a lamb he had. (1-10)

Wordsworth's emphasis on the public place of this meeting, however, seems to contrast the 'strange' behaviour of Shylock with the more restrained and embarrassed English man, who is ashamed of his tears or passion. But the 'confused' state of the shepherd, who at one stage believed every man he met 'knew some ill of me,' and was also inclined to 'wicked deeds' because of the loss of his flock, owes a debt to Shakespeare's dramatic intensifying of Shylock's passionate response to Jessica's elopement and theft. This is repeatedly given expression in the use of the rhetorical figure of *geminatio* or doubling. The doubling is staged as a more melancholic repetition by Wordsworth:

They dwindled, dwindled, one by one,  
And I may say that many a time  
I wished they all were gone:  
They dwindled one by one away;  
For me it was a woeful day. (66-70)

The same use of repetition in the ballad, as the shepherd's flock dwindles away, is meant to transpose or translate this same passion in a quieter key. Having the shepherd narrate his own story gives a voice to the shepherd which is not the same kind as that given to the woman in 'The Mad Mother', however, which is entirely dramatic in form. Wordsworth gets inside the head of his subject in that poem in much the way that Coleridge describes Shakespeare doing in the protean passage from *Biographia*.<sup>271</sup> In 'The Last of the Flock', however, the reversal is from a perspective

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<sup>271</sup> BL II 27.

slanted and coloured by the subjective impressions of a prejudiced observer in the play, to the disinterested and more objective view of a narrator who listens to the man's story from his perspective. Thus the reversals are also like the transpositions in music in which what is played in a minor key is plaintive, and when played in another key is jaunty or even comic, if that word can be applied to music.

The musical analogy I use here is a common enough metaphor, and it is not, of course, without its problems. But, I hope to show that it does have a place in my thesis. A transposer was actually the name given to an early modern instrument that could actually perform the function of transposing music from one key into another. The transposing analogy is used in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Theseus declares to Hypolita that having wooed her with his sword, he will 'wed [her] in another key.'<sup>272</sup> The transposition of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' that is presented in Bottom's interlude, however, changes the key from tragic to comic notes, and the 'pomp and triumph' these actors may themselves have imagined for their performance and its reception, is literally turned to 'revelry' as they descend from the sublime to the ridiculous, as Theseus makes clear in his comment on the passionate performance Bottom gives of the death of Pyramus.<sup>273</sup> It must be said, however, that it makes for a far better atmosphere for a wedding celebration than their tragedy would have done.

The difficulty of getting the tone right in reading Wordsworth's ballads has often been commented on, and may account for the perplexity with which his poems are and were often met. Poems on the page do not sound themselves, and Coleridge

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<sup>272</sup> Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword.  
And won thy love doing thee injuries;  
But I will wed thee in another key,

With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling. (*MND* I i.16-19).

<sup>273</sup> This passion, and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad. (*V* i. 277-8).

was well aware of the problem and expressed his concerns in 1816.<sup>274</sup> Wordsworth too seems to have been aware of it very early on.

In the Cornell edition of *Lyrical Ballads* the editors produce a fragment written in Dorothy Wordsworth's hand, which they conjecture is the only remaining part of the original essay which Wordsworth intended to publish with the second edition of the poems. He did not publish the essay, though he said that it had been 'nearly finished,' but it required so many 'quotations to illustrate the argument' that he decided against it as 'the Essay must be spun to so great a length as to make it utterly unfit for the work.' The fragment is found in an interleaved copy of Coleridge's *Poems* (1796) used in 1800 for manuscript work related to *Michael*. What is interesting for my argument at this point is that it relates to 'transpositions,' and though we cannot be certain in what sense Wordsworth actually meant the word to be used in the context of his own poetry, I think it can be fairly well established that these transpositions were meant to be pleasurable for the reader when and if he could recognise them. In order to reduce the amount of text quoted I here omit the many revisions made in the manuscript:

[...] frequently done in any class of Composition which has taken a deep hold on the affections of the Poet. By imitating such transpositions a poet may sometimes revive the pleasurable feelings attached to the recollection of these poems in the mind of his Reader, & by so doing may produce a pleasure which will more than counterbalance any displeasure which such transpositions wd otherwise occasion. But this liberty

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<sup>274</sup> See Coleridge on the reception of *Christabel* before and after publication where the reading of the poem by an 'enkindling Reciter' is contrasted with the possibility that the same poem may 'flag beneath the feelings of a reader.' *BL* II 239-40. For a very persuasive argument on the 'anxiety of reception' in the romantic period, especially for Coleridge and Wordsworth, see Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

must be used with great caution: Not wantonly & capriciously but under the control of certain fixed laws. What I have said upon metre to which this subject is nearly akin may be applied here.

From this review, imperfect as it is the Reader will be able to collect [revised from perceive] how small must be the stock of words and phrases, how few the peculiarities of language to which the Poet, even when he speaks in his own person can have any relational claim.<sup>275</sup>

If what Wordsworth did go on to write on metre in the Preface — that it exercises a certain degree of control over the passions expressed in the language of poetry, and is determined by ‘certain fixed laws,’ to which the poet’s use of imagery is not subjected — is applied to what appears to be the favourable use of allusions or phrases which are the recognizable language of well known poems, then the somewhat rigid theory on the use or abuse of poetic diction would appear to have been tempered already in Wordsworth’s mind (or Coleridge’s?) by the admission into original poetry of recognisable poetic phrases, even before the Preface went to press.

One use of the word transpose is in the rhetorical figure of hyperbaton. The OED quotes one use of the word used in this sense which may have been familiar to Wordsworth:

1727 H. HERBERT tr. Fleury's Eccl. Hist. I. 62

‘There are so many...hyperbatons and transpositions, which render his stile difficult.’<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Fragment in DC MS 28. William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992). 739-40.

<sup>276</sup> ‘Hyperbaton,’ The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (1991).

This kind of transposition in which the word order in a sentence is reversed or changed for dramatic purposes, or emphasis, is one which Wordsworth uses often enough, but is itself, of course, a deviation from the language of conversation.

The connection of both of these terms with translation is in their derivation from the root sense of ‘a change of place’ or ‘modification’ in some sense or other. Clive Scott gives yet another definition and examples of poetic ‘transpositions’ in a chapter which experiments with various versions of several poems which are offered in different poetic forms:

These serve an investigation into translation as formal transposition, as a means of exploring the expressive range of various fixed forms, called upon to deal with material which puts their flexibility to the test.<sup>277</sup>

The possibility which transposition of forms offered to Wordsworth is something I will consider in more detail in the following chapter, when I look at the ways in which elements of *A Midsummer Nights Dream* are given expression in the ballad, epic and ode forms, which hopefully shows how that kind of ‘expressive range’ is developed by Wordsworth in quite remarkable ways. The most obvious use of the word in connection with the imagination, again comes from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the speech I have already quoted:

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,

Love can transpose to form and dignity.

(I ii 232-33)

Equating imagination with love, the modifying power of imagination is that which in the context of poetry can ‘amend’ by transposition the defects of a work

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<sup>277</sup> Scott, *Translating Baudelaire*, 10.



which lacks vision, or conversely which gives dignity and form to that which is merely considered base. The expressive range of any poem is determined often by the form itself, but as Scott implies, the ‘experiment’ is the surest way to test the flexibility of those forms, and the range of their expression.<sup>278</sup>

Another fragment, which Hale White identifies from a cancelled passage in the printer’s copy of the 1800 Preface, which has since been lost, refers specifically to translation as the method by which the reader is to recognise defective or vicious language.

The reader has only to translate this sonnet into such language as any person of good sense and lively sensibility, one I mean who does not talk out of books—would use upon such an occasion in real life, and he will at once perceive in what manner the passage printed in italics are defective.<sup>279</sup>

One can see here in the juxtaposition of these two cancelled passages that there is already a contradiction implied. This was perhaps to be the main source of contention for Coleridge, in the obvious failure of Wordsworth to comply with his own stated theory, which is a leading argument of *Biographia*. On the one hand ‘transpositions’ are admissible under certain fixed laws, and on the other the poet ought not to ‘talk out of books.’

The fact that some of Wordsworth’s characters may themselves be based on characters ‘out of books’ complicates still further Wordsworth’s attempt to clarify his theory, and the above passage could not be included if it was his own practice to turn to books for inspiration too, and more to my point, to translate them into a language

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<sup>278</sup> Mary Jacobus suggests that the poems exhibit ‘the attempt to provide a more significant *literary* experience than his readers were used to finding in the overworked themes and genres of their time.’ Jacobus, (1976), 208.

<sup>279</sup> *LB*, Butler and Green, Appendix III, n.107, 763-4.

spoken by ordinary men, rustics no less, and in the language of his own period. Whatever he may have intended about the viciousness of poetic diction at this point, however, he had changed his mind about at least one of his examples, the sonnet referred to above, when in a later edition he actually used the lines he was going to quote as vicious, in a poem of his own because they expressed his own feelings exactly!<sup>280</sup>

In chapter one when I introduced the idea that many of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* 1798 could be said to stage the imagination in lovers, lunatics and poets, the shepherd of 'The Last of The Flock' would be classified under the second type, but there is more substance to the shepherd than the 'The Mad Mother,' in that his character *as* a shepherd is fore-grounded in the way that Wordsworth felt the sailor's in 'The Ancient Mariner' was not. But it could be said equally of Wordsworth's shepherd that he does not act, but is acted upon.

The shepherd is aware that his distress caused him to suspect others of harbouring evil thoughts about him, and he thought about committing 'wicked deeds,' but he seems to have gone past that stage, into one which is more redolent of despair than the 'craziness' which earlier possessed him:

No peace, no comfort could I find,

No ease, within doors or without,

And crazily and wearily,

I went my work about.

The shepherd's loss of his flock brings about the wandering, loss of ease, and the sense of a lack of the comforts which should be found at home. Homesickness, or

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<sup>280</sup> LB, Butler and Green, 763. n 107.

nostalgia, is one of the 'diseases' which Darwin classifies as yet another form of insanity, and which, in its presentation as the calenture, Wordsworth was to refer to in *The Brothers*, could therefore be said to be *the* occupational disease of the mariner. Wordsworth stages this wandering homelessness more directly in 'Song for the Wandering Jew,' and in the sufferings of Margaret and Ruth.

The shepherd in 'The Last of the Flock' is one of those whose way of life is transformed by economic changes, from a previously happy existence to one of abject misery. This would seem a long way from *The Merchant of Venice*, but the classification of the play as a comedy, or rather a romance, does not of course preclude its having tragic undertones, and it is these undertones which Wordsworth seems to have been particularly interested in presenting, as situations in which suffering is contrasted with earlier happiness, and the character's emotional response to that change in circumstances is the main focus, rather than the situation itself.

The shepherd may have been inclined to wicked deeds but he seems to have been deterred from these by imagining that others knew his wicked intentions and could read his mind. What he may do next, however, what he *can* do next, is another matter which we as readers can only speculate on, but given the examples of other poems in the volume, what else might be expected but tragedy or disaffection.

What Shylock does next after the loss of his daughter and duckets, is not necessarily what he would have done had Jessica not eloped with his money, but it is interesting that Shakespeare presents Shylock's demand of the forfeiture of his bond with Antonio as merely a sport a distinct possibility; a wager as apparently playful as the casket game, which requires only a display of mutual respect or love in the form of tolerant acceptance in order to settle the matter to everyone's satisfaction. This is perhaps further hinted at in the scene in which Shylock deliberates on whether or not

to dine at the home of Bassanio. He knows he is 'not bid for love' (MV II v 13) but flattery, and he determines to go because he would rather go in hate than not at all.

Shylock himself comments, on hearing Bassanio's distrust of his claim that the bond is merely a 'sport': 'O father Abraham, what these Christians are, /Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect/ The thoughts of others.' (MV II ii 59-60) That the shepherd's own evil thoughts made him think evil of others is a subtle recognition of a psychological insight which Wordsworth may have learned from Shakespeare. The point made by Wordsworth in his ballad version of the play, is that the Jewish Shylock's grief in Venice's narrow streets has much in common with a proverbial broad English highway, and a local, supposedly Christian shepherd in a Christian community who prays to God in his distress, imagining he has been cursed by that God.

Each could be said to stage the site of a distraction, an errancy or wandering engendered by the loss of an assured identity which was conferred on them by their success in their businesses, and which is exacerbated by the conflicting roles both have to play as fathers. But Wordsworth's presentation of the character telling his own story ultimately compels a sympathetic response very much at odds with the way the other characters speak *of* Shylock in the play. The shepherd's distress is never meant to be mocked; Shylock's distress, however, is only the comic spectacle others choose to make it.

The shepherd's parish charity board's decision not to give him money to tide him over the obvious drop in trade due to the 'evil time' of the war is a failure of charity just as heartless as that staged in Venice. No matter what Antonio's love towards Bassanio may be based on, it is not extended to the rich Jew Shylock. Each character, Shylock and the shepherd, is driven to obsessive repetition in their

language, as Wordsworth's 1800 preface points out in relation to passionate utterance in general. In one sense this is engendered by the 'passion' brought about by a threatened loss of a complex sense of their own identity, as businessmen or speculators, and as fathers; and in another sense by each being a victim of a socially and culturally powerful, but none-the-less purely imagined 'curse.' This, as Wordsworth points out as a 'fact' in his note to 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill,' is, even in so called enlightened times, still being repeated.

The socially imposed and self internalised scapegoating which Rene Girard sees as operative in the play in Antonio's insistence in the trial scene that he is doomed as 'a whether of the flock,' is heard again in the shepherd's belief that it was an 'evil time' and though he prayed 'God cursed me in my sore distress.'

Girard sees Antonio's bald statement working in the play alongside the double vision of an irony which works by staging one version of events at the level of theatricality, and another opposite point of view at the level of allusion. The same kind of irony operates in Wordsworth's ballad by way of a transformation or transposition of the character and circumstances. The play's insistence on structural differences of all kinds, Jew and Christian, old age and youth, Belmont and Venice, revenge and mercy, Girard sees as constantly undermined by the allusive recognition of similarities in the so called dissimilarities between the protagonists and their supposed opposites.

The cynical denial of charity which Girard detects everywhere because the Venetians can no longer differentiate between revenge and charity, is played out in the ballad when the shepherd asks for charity and is denied it because he is supposedly wealthy, even though he has ten children to feed. To take away the means of earning his livelihood is to destroy the man's sense of worth as a citizen and, like

Shylock, he is the victim of a kind of pleasurable vindictiveness on the part of his fellow parishioners, seemingly having Girard's 'envy' or jealousy, as its root, at the thought of his downfall, which is equally evident in Shylock's joy in Antonio's loss.<sup>281</sup> There is also a sense of misplaced Godwinian 'benevolence,' in the behaviour of the Parish board, which it seems can only be directed at the totally abstract notion of 'the poor' in the poem, and not at the needy individual in front of them.

They said I was a wealthy man;  
My sheep upon the mountain fed,  
And it was fit that thence I took  
Whereof to buy us bread"  
"Do this; how can we give to you,"  
They cried, "what to the poor is due?"

Wordsworth's emphasis on the pathos rather than the 'situation' is part of that claim in the Preface that the feelings that men have in common rather than their differences was the more important element he wished to stress in his poetry. The information required of the reader to understand his poems was not that needed in his professional capacity as a lawyer, mariner or doctor but as a man who might also be a brother, husband or father. The poems themselves, though, stage the sufferings of women: daughters, mothers, lovers and wives, as well as husbands, fathers, and brothers.

Wordsworth apologises in the 1800 Preface for not having 'undertaken a systematic defence of the theory' on which his poems are written, but suggests that

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<sup>281</sup> Rene Girard, 'To Entrap the Wisest: Sacrificial Ambivalence in the *Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III*' from René Girard, "Sacrificial Ambivalence in the *Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III*." Theatre of Envy: Shakespeare (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Reprinted in Russ McDonald, ed., Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1945-2000 (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). 353-364.

one of the causes of our pleasure in metrical language is a 'principle' familiar to 'those who have made any of the arts the object of accurate reflection,' that of the 'pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of 'similitude in dissimilitude.' The pleasure I would argue, which he wished to give his readers is partly the recognition of his sources of inspiration, his transpositions being one of them. This would appear to have been something Wordsworth expected from his readers but which did not materialise, hence the endless clarifications needed in his Prefaces from 1798 to 1815. The similarities and differences between *The Merchant of Venice* and 'The Last of The Flock' are those which history and political circumstances, changes in opinion and law may dictate, and Wordsworth's so called conservatism in his later life has generally been considered as the turning of his back on his earlier radicalism, but the poem stages a situation which Wordsworth still speaks against most vehemently in the Post Script to his edition of 1835.

In this Post Script he defends, in 'the present volume' and those which preceded it, certain 'opinions expressed on the course of public affairs, and feelings given vent to as national interest excited them.' His main argument is against the changes which had been proposed to the Poor Laws in the Reform Bill, and he protests that introducing means testing, and leaving the contributions made by wealthier citizens as voluntary, can only lead to the kinds of situation which are described in so many of his poems, but particularly in 'The Last of The Flock'. When people are reduced to abject poverty without the assurance that they can rely on parish relief, it is the surest way to strip them of their dignity, civic pride, and worth as a person. Wordsworth's post-script is basically a plea for a fully legislated charity, which does not discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving, and expects contributions from all who can afford it. The final justification for Wordsworth's

support of this precursor of the welfare state, is found in the Biblical parables he so often transforms himself.

...And as Providence, in this care of our countrymen, acts through a human medium, the objects of that care must, in like manner, be more inclined towards a grateful love of their fellow men. Thus also, do stronger ties attach the people to their country, whether while they tread its soil, or, at a distance, think of their native soil as an indulgent parent, to whose arms, even they who have been imprudent and undeserving, may, like the prodigal son, betake themselves without fear of being rejected.<sup>282</sup>

The medium through which the shepherd expected relief was prayer to God, who he then believed had cursed him. It should have been to those human agents, the supposed Christians, who had the charge of parish relief, and whose lack of charity leaves the man tottering on the edge of the despair which drives Margaret's husband and Ruth to a life of crime, or places them, like scapegoats or whethers of the flock, outside society's limits. In his article on Shakespeare's play, Girard exposes the double values which make the courtroom in Venice a fitting model for the commercialising spirit of nineteenth century Britain, in that the idol of wealth and trade has overtaken even the natural relationships between parents and children, and made of Christian ethics a monstrosity in which a man's professed faith appears to be more important than religious tolerance, and the *hope* of monetary gain more important than charity or love. The play is a romance and seems to play out its contradictions in a happy ending which suits all those involved, but Venice's treatment of Shylock's faith, in spite of its own professed values, is to spit on it.

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<sup>282</sup> Oxford Wordsworth, (1969), 757.



Wordsworth eschews that kind of effect, but the effects which the Parish's denial of charity has had on the weeping shepherd, is due to a transposition which plays the 'harsh' and 'grating' music of Venice's carnival, in which men with varnished faces play on the squealing, wry-necked fife,<sup>283</sup> in a sadder key.

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<sup>283</sup> *Shylock*. Lock up my doors and when you hear the drum,  
And the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife,  
Clamber not you up to the casement then,  
Nor thrust your head into the public street,  
To gaze on Christian fools with varnish'd faces. (*MV* II v 29-32)  
'Tintern Abbey' opposes the 'harsh' and 'grating' to the 'still, sad music of humanity.' (91-92)

## Chapter 6 ‘Similitude in Dissimilitude’: *Michael*, History, and Shakespeare

### 1. A History Homely and Rude

The differences between *Richard II* and *Michael* seem on the surface to be irreconcilable, yet on closer inspection the details of the poem turn out to be based on what for critics and readers of his own period, are apparently insignificant details of the play. These are not the great national events played out in the history, but the domestic tragedies played out in the family relationships, which is more often than not the ‘matter’ of Shakespeare’s plays. The pleasure of noticing the ‘similitude in dissimilitude’ which transformation performs, and perhaps transposition was meant to effect, has, however, proved stubbornly resistant to recognition.

Wordsworth’s concern with home and the importance of the stability of domestic affections places the supposedly natural bonds which maintain these ties securely in the domain of political intervention. Mentioning the proliferation of work houses, soup kitchens and, importantly for my argument here ‘the increased taxes on postage’ which prevented the poor from writing to each other, Wordsworth makes a case for economic and political measures to be taken to resist these disastrous changes, when he writes to Charles Fox that the destruction of ‘independent’ family life is the greatest threat that a land can sustain. When he sent the Whig MP a copy of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* 1801, in the letter accompanying them he is at pains to draw the politician’s attention to the two poems ‘The Brothers’ and ‘Michael.’

Pater’s ‘aesthetic’ criticism, as Richard’s soliloquy on wasting time, quoted in my last chapter shows, picks up a strain of Shakespearean musical and other imagery

which reflects upon Richard's mismanagement of the affairs of state, which should be the 'occupation' of a king. Time wasted, the wasting of the land, the wasting of Old Gaunt, as well as the breaking and making in time of oaths and bonds, are among the recurring themes which Shakespeare replays in the speech and throughout this drama of feudal power relations, family conflict and divided loyalties. That Pater should link the unity of the play to a *Lyrical Ballad* in terms of its tone is interesting in terms of my argument here because it is as just such a transformation from one genre into another that we can approach Wordsworth's 'translation' of the tragedy of *Richard II* into the pastoral history *Michael*.

Susan Wolfson's detailed exposition of a 'questioning presence' in Wordsworth's poetry which challenges the reader, (perhaps to make responses like De Quincey's or Charles Burney's to *Lyrical Ballads*<sup>284</sup>) not only to read closely but as John Stoddard, who had just spent time with Wordsworth during the vexed period of

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<sup>284</sup> The lack of intervention by those who have power to give substantial aid, underscores Wordsworth's emphasis on the necessity of action rather than passivity, a fault which he detects in the character of the Ancient Mariner. See Preface 1800. De Quincey famously asks why the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, instead of admonishing the poet (whose perplexed concern for Margaret elicits the response that he should not 'read the forms of things with an unworthy eye,' does not make enquiries of the military about what has happened to Robert, Margaret's missing husband who has enlisted in the army. Sir Charles Burney wonders why the author of 'The Last of The Flock,' if he is wealthy, suffered the shepherd to sell his last lamb, rather than alleviate his poverty. He also, though, assumed the shepherd must have been indolent, injudicious or vicious to have become so poor! See Robert Woof, *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 2001). 74-78. This is a reader in Hazlitt's 'wise men' category who do not 'understand' Wordsworth's poetry, (*The Spirit of the Age*, (2004), 204). Hazlitt is credited by Bate with being the first critic to sympathise with Shylock. He discounts William Hole who was seemingly the first to do this, as he was relatively unknown, and also unreliable, because he 'also set out to apologise for the character and conduct of Iago!' I would suggest, though, that it is not impossible that Wordsworth or Coleridge had read Hole's essay while in Somerset. (Coleridge refers to his own membership of this society in *Biographia* itself. (BL I 19-20) It contains a transposed dialogue in which he makes the merchant a Jew and Shylock a Christian in order to show that their actions are at least understandable and motivated, given their provocations, and importantly here, emphasises the Godwinian stress on negative circumstances as accountable for crime. His version is supposedly written by a member of a Jewish theatrical company in a hypothetical Jerusalem. Wordsworth too justifies the Iago like and Godwinian protagonist in his 1797 play *The Borderers*, as a feasible characterisation in his short preface to the play first published in 1840. William Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, The Cornell Wordsworth, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). Hazlitt's sympathy for Shylock, therefore, might well have come via Wordsworth and his portrayal of the Shylock figure of 'The Last of the Flock.' Despite provocation though, Wordsworth's shepherds do not contemplate revenge, but they are tempted to 'evil thoughts.' See *Essays, by a society of gentlemen, at Exeter*. (Exeter, 1796). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servelet/ECCO>. Accessed 20 May, 2007.

the composition of *Michael* recommended, to pay attention to apparently trivial details:

Who that hath studied Shakespeare, must not be  
conscious how often the connection of minute and  
trifling incidents with the main story has eluded his  
observation, until after repeated perusals?<sup>285</sup>

Whether the same question which the parson asks in *The Brothers*, 'Why can he tarry yonder?' was not continually asked by his abandoned brother, we do not know; the graveyard tells no stories, nature does not respond in Wordsworth's poetry, but neither does it 'betray the heart that loved her.'<sup>286</sup> More specifically, might a reader not ask 'why were no letters sent?' The painfully *unobvious* importance of the letter Leonard writes at the end is not, as Wolfson suggests, 'superfluous to the reader' because, as she argues, we have already learned Leonard's story. A letter would not have been as superfluous to his brother, as the Pastor smugly tells Leonard that written epitaphs or even names would be on the mounds which are the graves in the churchyard.

Leonard's final act in the poem is to write a letter to the priest in which he writes down what he was unable to bring himself to speak of, simply telling him who he is. True, the tale has been told by the interrogative mode which the dramatic dialogue employs and the irony of Leonard's hidden identity is never lost on the reader. But his brother's emotional life, and the continuity of that relationship, depended upon his links with Leonard. Communication is a crucial element in the survival and well being of the individuals in these poems who have been left behind or for the comfort of those who survive. No records being kept of the lives of the

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<sup>285</sup> *Wordsworth: Critical Heritage*, 138-143. Here attributed to John Stoddard.

<sup>286</sup> 'Tintern Abbey.'

poor, the marginalised or the forgotten ‘who hold a silent station’<sup>287</sup> in life, means that they do not value themselves as ‘worthy’ of a history and neither apparently does society. The apparently insignificant detail of a letter becomes, tragically, the hinge on which the ‘fate’ of characters in these poems depends as in many of Shakespeare’s plays. The imposition of a higher postage tax to support the war with France, then, was a political intervention which impinged most on those who had most need of these communications with their kin.

*Michael* is a poem which is more directly and allusively linked with the history of *Richard II*. When critics assume that Shakespeare’s history cycle celebrates the providential rise of the Tudor dynasty, we also note how much is dependent on the wilful denial or chance delay of communication and the consequences of rumour in influencing the course of events. As in *The Brothers* lack of communication can have dire effects on the supposedly ‘providential’ nature of events. A point which may be taken as significant in Wordsworth’s portrayal of the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, who is both seemingly complacent in his acceptance of a natural and providential order and prone to the baneful influence of rumour and supposition when, for example, he imagines the ex- revolutionary Solitary to be dead because a funeral is taking place. It is not the Solitary but a Lear like old shepherd, who has died of exposure because of the neglect of his female employer, who is to be buried. Similarly the Wanderer’s imperialist vision of Britain’s greatness and his optimistic view of the benefits which are to ensue by expansionism are highly questionable given the tragedies which have been unfolded by the pastor’s tales in the churchyard. The kind of doubling of vision which Wordsworth employs here and elsewhere is similarly used in Shakespeare’s history plays.

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<sup>287</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XII 52.

The ruse by which Prince John in 2 Henry IV withholds a message from the King offering terms of truce and reconciliation to the rebels, including redress of their grievances is an example of what Kiernan Ryan calls Shakespeare's use of doubling in the Henry IV plays:

Part two is riddled with double-takes, false starts and stops, rewrites and reversals of expectation: all of them calculated to resist, and thereby transform, the ultimate course things must take to climax in the defeat of the rebels and the coronation of the prodigal redeemed.<sup>288</sup>

This same use of doubling and reversals, misidentifications, recourse to rumour, and possible but missed opportunities to transform 'the ultimate course of things' is the kind of non-providential history which Wordsworth draws upon in the *The Brothers* and *Michael*.

Michael is an eighty year old Lakeland shepherd and freeholder, statesmen as they were called in Westmoreland. He is an independent landowner, whose property has been in the family for generations.<sup>289</sup> The poem, however, appears to stage the loss of that hereditary land through the implied failure of Michael's only son Luke, born to him very late in life, to resist the pressures of 'dissolute city' life, and the ultimate breaking of his bonds with the land, his ancestors, and his father. Sending Luke to the city, however, is a result of Michael's having signed a bond to act as guarantor for one of his nephews' ventures. This has failed, and rather than sell part of his land, he mortgages it, which was the situation when he inherited the land: 'Not more than half of my inheritance was mine,' and which he had worked most of his life

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<sup>288</sup> Kiernan Ryan. "The Future of History: 1 and 2 Henry IV." Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). 56.

<sup>289</sup> For a discussion of the use of this term by Wordsworth, and the cultural and historical revisionism which Liu suggests that might entail, see Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

to redeem. Michael decides, against the feelings of his heart, and changing his mind at times, to send Luke away in order to earn the money by which he will repay this new mortgage. A covenant is imposed by the father on the son as he leaves for the city, in the symbolic laying of the first stone of a projected sheepfold, the memory of which is to act as his 'anchor and shield':

An emblem of the life thy fathers liv'd,  
Who, being innocent, did for that cause  
Bestir them in good deeds. (420-22)

The ruins of the unfinished sheepfold, which the narrator of the poem declares at the outset of the poem is the hidden site of a 'story;' is also the marker of the 'history, homely and rude' we are about to be told. Michael's determination and thrift in trying to keep the land from going into other hands, it transpires, has been wasted by his prodigal son. We are told very little of the circumstances of Luke's fall from grace only that 'ignominy and shame' forced him 'to seek a hiding place beyond the seas.' Meanwhile the sheepfold is never completed and Michael dies without seeing his son again.

The twists which actually work against Michael are not fated but are due to his responding to the calls of his own kinsman on him for allegiance or support, by acting as bondsman or guarantor for the repayment of a loan which is later called in. As in Richard II, where Gaunt's conflicting roles as father to Bolingbroke, uncle and subject to Richard, cause him to agree to the banishing of his own son for the sake of his sworn bond to the king, Michael is partly culpable for the demise of his son, but like Gaunt he is also not responsible for Luke's actions. Bolingbroke breaks the terms of his banishment in order to redeem his rightful inheritance, which has been illegally seized by Richard. Richard so doing places the law, all law, on a shaky basis, if the

whims of the King can supplant it. Bolingbroke's desire for greater power, like Richard's expansionism, has its counterpart in the material desires for more land, or the 'honourable gain' (73), which Michael can associate with the hills where he grazes his sheep. The industrious labours of Michael and his wife can be contrasted with the questionable honours conferred on the nobles in the play for supporting the King or in supporting Bolingbroke in pursuit of power. Only when we read the poem with the play can we see the connections Wordsworth makes between excess desire and possible tragedy, but there is also an implied criticism of feudal dynastic power and its relation to property, in that it is the ultimate cause of the tragic events in both pieces.

In writing to Fox about the importance of the domestic affections and the relationship of the ownership of landed property by 'small statesmen' to those feelings, Wordsworth is drawing the Whig politician's attention to the plight of a group of individuals who like the Shepherd in *The Last of the Flock* were not considered to be suffering untowardly as a consequence of the war, but whose loyalty could be relied on only so far as they were not reduced to abject poverty. Wordsworth's concerns with suffering, though, had become less centred on the poor as members of the lower classes than on the suffering of individuals as his letter to Fox makes clear:

Necessitated as you have been from your public situation to have much to do with men in bodies, and in classes, and accordingly to contemplate them in that relation, it has been your praise that you have not been prevented from looking at them as individuals, and that



you perpetually left your heart open to be influenced by them in that capacity.<sup>290</sup>

Though Wordsworth's main point in the letter is that the domestic affections are being eroded to the detriment of social ties, he also implicitly makes the point that the domestic affections, as Coleridge had argued in his lecture refuting Godwin's seeming denial of their ultimate worth in the economy of benevolence, radiate outwards to friends, community and the nation, culminating in a patriotism which is based on 'domestic' feelings rather than imposed bonds or sworn oaths of loyalty.<sup>291</sup>

Their little tract of land is a rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written which makes them the object of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten. It is a fountain fitted to the nature of social man, from which supplies of affection, as pure as his heart was intended for, are daily drawn<sup>292</sup>.

The consequences of deprivation, including the loss of property or even the prospect of its loss, were seen by Wordsworth as more likely causes of political disaffection and rebellion than adherence to purely modern rational philosophical principles. Imagination in the form of desire rather than reason governs people's lives, and the lack of an imagined stake in the land, or a hope of improvement provoked the desire and the need to leave it, or the impulse to rebel. The evidence of that had been widespread enough in the last ten years in the French revolution itself, in the general rise in poverty and homelessness, and the consequent drive to emigration to the

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<sup>290</sup> *EY* 305.

<sup>291</sup> See Peter Kitson for an overview of Coleridge's changing political opinions over his career, especially his disputed claim that his enduring belief was that 'property must be the basis of government' in 'Political thinker' Lucy Newlyn, *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 156-169.

<sup>292</sup> *EY* 315.

colonies subsequent on the war. The connection, then, of individually owned landed property and, therefore, of an emotional as well as an economic relationship to the land to the stability and allegiances of a people, is linked by Wordsworth to their personal investment in the land itself.<sup>293</sup>

Telling stories which recount the tragedies which befall individuals whose ties to home, family and nation, and to their own sense of identity, have been destroyed by war, the greed of others, or their own susceptibility to ‘powerful’ words and imagined scenarios, *Lyrical Ballads* transforms the reflections of his original, what Coleridge calls the meditative mind of Shakespeare, and which Wordsworth holds as a stock of ‘thoughts,’ into a poetry of the people.

In the opening section of *Michael*, recalling Richard’s words to the Queen as he parts from her that she should ‘in Winter’s tedious nights, sit by the fire / With good old folks / and let them tell thee tales, / Of woeful ages long ago betid’ (5.1.40-41), Wordsworth re-directs the struggling climber to a place he might ‘not notice’:

.....a stragglng heap of unhewn stones

And to that place a story appertains,

Which though it be ungarnished with events,

Is not unfit I deem for the fire-side,

Or for the summer shade.

The Queen is encouraged by Richard to tell her own tale of ‘the lamentable fall of me’ but Wordsworth’s story is not one which will recall the momentous ‘events’ of the fall of kings, and therefore there will be only simple, plainly told,

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<sup>293</sup> Many critics have noted this letter as the key to Wordsworth’s attitude to landed property at the time but the letter has proved to be a source of contention. See below for some of those conflicting views.

ungarnished fare. The poem, though, is not entirely plain, it is always to be read, as most imitations or translations were, with the original to one side of it.

Wordsworth's opening sets a scene in which the reader is supposedly turned away from the 'public way' of 'The Last of the Flock' to a place of 'utter solitude' but which, none the less, is expressed using adjectival phrases, noun imperatives and conventional tropes which do not speak the language of pastoral, as the subscription to the poem promises, but of the ordeal which chivalric order imposes. This is the language of public discourse, of tumultuous times and righteous challenge which makes the struggles of the pastoral life as serious a political concern as the destinies of nations and Kings which were being fought out in the background. One begins to sense that the hidden valley which offers a refuge of sorts from the 'Mountains' is not unrelated to that 'history' which Wordsworth draws on by contrast with his 'homely and rude' pastoral tale.

If from the public way you turn your steps  
Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Gill,  
You will suppose that with an upright path  
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent  
The pastoral Mountains front you face to face.  
But, courage! For beside that boisterous Brook  
The mountains have all opened out themselves,  
And made a hidden valley of their own.

Here is the opening scene of *Richard II*:

K. Rich. Old John of Gaunt, time honoured Lancaster,  
Hast thou according to thine oath and bond,

Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,  
Here to make good the boist'rous late appeal,  
Which then our leisure would not make us hear,  
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

Gaunt. I have my liege.

K. Rich. Tell me moreover hast thou sounded him

If he appeal the duke on ancient malice,  
Or worthily, as a good subject should,  
On some known ground of treachery in him?

Gaunt. As near as I could sift him on that argument

On some apparent danger seen in him  
Aimed at your highness- no inveterate malice.

K. Rich. Then call them to our presence face to face

And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear  
The accuser and the accused freely speak.  
High stomached are they both and full of ire,  
In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire. ( I i 1-19)

Wordsworth firstly transforms the structural element of the dialogue into a monologue, restaging it as a version of the Chorus which operates as guide and the prompter of thoughts and imagined scenic shifts in Henry V, taking on the functions which Anny Crunelle Vanrigh sees as the dramatic equivalent of the presenter at pageants and processions which were performed on temporary stages and the more permanent street architecture in Elizabethan London. Wordsworth's gesturing presenter, as in typical Renaissance paintings, points to a resting place in order to

direct attention to ‘rural architecture’<sup>294</sup> of a meaner sort.<sup>295</sup> Whilst the narrator of *Michael* has been critiqued as a form of mock tourist guide to the Lakes parodying the conventions of the picturesque, I think that the dramatic and theatrical connotations of the language and the formal properties of the Prologue could be given more weight.

The narrator’s opening gesture ‘turns’ the struggling climber back from further ‘supposed’ ascent to a place midway between the lowest and highest part of that climb where the mountains have all ‘opened out themselves’, revealing a hidden valley on whose opened pages (the ‘place’ of local description and the locus of memory) a ruined sheepfold appears to which a ‘story appertains.’ Thus fold and enfolding mountains unfold in story and book. As Vanrigh suggests, in *Henry V* ‘the function of the chorus alternates the language of the civic and the dramatic show’

Like his civic counterpart, the dramatic Chorus controls sight and insight, inviting the audience to "behold," and "see," "[s]uppose," "think," and "work [their] thoughts."...now informing the audience that such or such a place "is the playhouse now, there must you sit" (II.Chorus.36), now wishing he had "A kingdom for a stage, princes to act, / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene".<sup>296</sup>

Wordsworth’s transformation of the opening challenge scene and his own ‘challenge’ to orthodox criticism and poetic practice is to present not kings and

<sup>294</sup> In his ballad ‘Rural Architecture’ Wordsworth comically contrasts the destruction of the old, and rebuilding of the new which is taking place in Paris and London with the building of an imaginary ‘giant’ out of rocks by some Lakeland boys. It is continually knocked down by storms but Wordsworth determines to help to ‘[re]build up a giant’ with the boys. It is emblematic of his own project to make a ‘giant’ of the ordinary man equal to any hero of mythology, and to justify the people in their struggle for independence and liberty no matter how often the attempt is thwarted by events.

<sup>295</sup> Wordsworth may not have been aware of the fountains or conduits used for staging patriotic pageants in Elizabethan London. The use of the word ‘fountain’ and ‘tablet,’ ( though classical tropes) in his letter to Fox in connection with the cultivation of emotions attached to the land, also makes patriotism the task of retaining a physical association with place, and memory its source of renewal. The image is also used in *Richard II*.

<sup>296</sup> Anny Crunelle-Vanrigh, "*Henry V* as Royal Entry," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47.2 Spring (2007). 355-377.

monarchs but ordinary men. His stage is a site which will act as a memorial to and of the unwritten histories which transpired in this now ‘utter solitude.’ Calling his poem a ‘pastoral’ in the subtitle to the poem, he does, however, alert the reader to the equally valid claim within the poem itself that this pastoral is also a ‘history homely and rude.’

Typically of Wordsworth, words relating to the emotions are transferred from the characters to the landscape, a process which accentuates the figural nature of landscape description. The overuse of prosopopoeia or personification which Wordsworth has objected to in the Preface is here accented strongly, but it is not repeated throughout the rest of the poem which is written in Wordsworth and Shakespeare’s more familiar simple language. If anything, most descriptive work is left to the imagination of the reader in response to sparsely related and barely sketched outlines, without the intervention of fanciful imagery. The elaborate poetry which defines Richard is eschewed for Bolingbroke’s plain style. None the less, the pathos of the poem is finely controlled in keeping with Wordsworth’s dictum in the Preface that the human mind is capable of ‘excitement’ without the need for outrageous stimulants.

The poem finishes with a repetition of the description, of that ‘boisterous brook’ but the epithet tumultuous, as some critics have noted, has been dropped. Tumultuous is usually used to refer to loud commotion or disturbance which causes the time or situation to be considered dangerous or threatening, or in one obsolete sense refers to seditious practices. The solitude of the place perhaps says something of the quieter times that have ensued since Michael’s demise, but it also hints at the usurpation by imagination which *The Prelude* stages in the crossing of the Alps, and the usurpation by Bolingbroke of Richard’s crown. Hazlitt’s ‘levelling muse’ is the

ousting of the gaudy verse which Wordsworth's plain style revolution undertakes at the outset of the book. Wordsworth's double emphasis on the word makes the boisterousness a feature of nature, and that 'nature' is the boy Luke's inheritance, but in drawing attention to the way meaning has been translated from the human to the non-animate, he also demonstrates how that substitution of the human and the earthly, that metaphoric transfer, or translation, can create a false or fanciful relationship between the mind and nature which mirrors Michael's confusion of his love for Luke with the desire to keep all of his land.<sup>297</sup>

There is much more to be said on this aspect of the poem, especially on the relationship of Gaunt's speech on England to this poem and to 'Tintern Abbey,' where the 'dear, dear land' of Gaunt's speech is transferred to Wordsworth's 'dear, dear sister.' The latter poem's painterly method literally points out what the gardeners in the play can 'see' but which the 'blind man' (blinded by fancy perhaps) Gaunt, does not appear to see at all: the physical land itself:

Man. Why should we, in the compass of a pale.  
 Keep law and form and due proportion,  
 Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,  
 When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,  
 Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,  
 Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,  
 Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs  
 Swimming with caterpillars? (III iv 40-47)

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<sup>297</sup> For an account of the way Wordsworth utilises the concept of the 'divided heart' imaged in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry on the sheepfold as like 'a heart unequally divided,' and on other aspects of what Peterfreund sees as Wordsworth's stance against property ownership see Stuart Peterfreund, "Wordsworth on Covenants, "Heart Conditions", Primogeniture, Remains, and the Ties That Bind in 'Michael' and Elsewhere," *Criticism* 40.2 (1998). 191-215. Peterfreund also links the word 'heart' and 'betrayal' in this poem with 'Tintern Abbey'.

Bolingbroke's denial at his banishment that 'the bare imagination of a feast' can provide food to a starving man is echoed by Wordsworth in the 'pleasing thoughts' that the present memory of Tintern and his sister will provide 'life and food for future years.' (64-66) Wordsworth's refusal to use personification in general, is not absolute in the Preface, it is the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement that he stages in these poems.<sup>298</sup> Gaunt's 'state of excitement' is the pathos of his imminent death and his rage at Richard's excesses, and all his associations with England are martial, regal, and couched in the rhetoric of state power, hinting at excess. Wordsworth's associations in 'Tintern Abbey' are with the 'beauty of the landscape,' and his sister. Without the play text beside the poems, this transference would not be noted as also a literary transformation. This brief outline of the opening of *Michael* and its comparison with the play also shows us that the importance of opening scenes in Shakespeare was well noted by Wordsworth long before Schlegel produced the lectures Coleridge is often thought to have only plagiarised.<sup>299</sup>

Critics have argued variously on the genre of *Michael*, querying whether Wordsworth's pastoral owes its peculiarly complex and often puzzling form to its immediate forebears, to a new realism in pastoral, or to classical traditions.<sup>300</sup> Judith Page is one of several critics who have chosen to examine *Michael* in terms of its

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<sup>298</sup> There are other echoes of the play in 'Tintern Abbey,' for example in the repeated 'five long years' of the poem. Bolingbroke laments that 'four lagging winters and four wanton springs' can 'End in a word.' (l iii 212-13)

<sup>299</sup> Coleridge's lectures often follow Schlegel's closely but he did protest that he had given similar lectures in 1808 saying the same things. Wordsworth was dismayed when he heard in 1812 that Coleridge was about to begin lecturing on Shakespeare. In a letter to his wife he complained that Coleridge was demeaning himself by it: 'This is a most odious way of picking up money, and scattering about his own and his friend's thoughts.' William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Arranged and Edited by Ernest De Selincourt. A Supplement of New Letters*, ed. A. G. Hill, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). 55. This would suggest that Wordsworth was anxious that direct dissemination of his thoughts on Shakespeare might actually prevent readers from responding to his own poetry directly. For Coleridge on Shakespeare's first scenes see M. M. Badawi, *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). 70-73. In this he also refers to Coleridge's comments on the banishment scene in *Richard II*.

<sup>300</sup> See also Parrish, *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads*.



stated genre in the poem's subscription, as a pastoral poem. She traces the changes within the form from Theocritus to Virgil and, closer to the period covered by Romanticism, the controversy which arose on the respective merits of Pope's 'artificial' pastorals and Philips' more 'rustic' versions which John Gay's pastiches, originally written to mock Philips, unwittingly helped to make popular.<sup>301</sup> She also makes the point in choosing to use Wordsworth's designation of the story as 'a history homely and rude' as the title of her article that in earlier pastorals, according to Puttenham, the form was used "under the vaile of homely persons and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters".<sup>302</sup> Page argues that Wordsworth's shepherd

..is not a 'vaile' for greater matters but himself  
embodies those matters in their most enduring form. In  
this sense the adjectives 'homely' and 'rude' are ironic  
descriptions of Wordsworth's pastoral.<sup>302</sup>

But Wordsworth's use of Puttenham's exact words in the poem places his allusion as securely within the framework of the Renaissance period as in the year 1800. Wordsworth is clearly using Puttenham's words for a purpose. The greater matters Wordsworth's imitation implicitly refers to are those supposedly greater

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<sup>301</sup> J. W. Page, "A History Homely and Rude: Genre and Style in Wordsworth's 'Michael'," Studies In English Literature 1500-1900 29.4 (1989). 621-36. Wordsworth himself refers to these 'pastiche' pastorals in the 1815 Preface.

<sup>302</sup> Mark Jones in part reads *Michael* as a parody of pastoral. His discussion of Bakhtin's theories of parody in relation to Wordsworth's 'pastoral' is enlightening. If the form of the original cannot be sensed, for example, it makes parody almost impossible to detect. See Mark Jones, "Double Economics: Ambivalence in Wordsworth's Pastoral," PMLA 108.5 (1993).1098-1113. If the 'original' form of *Michael* is not pastoral, then it could not be detected as a parody of pastoral, however. Parody as a subset of translation is permitted by Tytler, but only when it mocks what is mediocre. However, Tytler 'praises the parodist's reversal of values in works of quality as virtuosity that in no way demeans the original' (Kelly, 2006), 70. It is possible to read Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetic transformations as parodic, (see pages 294-296 below on 'The Nightingale' and Coleridge's comment on Milton). Wordsworth's poetry makes us question the values of many of Shakespeare's characters in *Richard II*. In 'Tintern Abbey' the transformation of the unnatural imagery of Gaunt's speech on England enables Wordsworth to reflect on the natural landscape and its poorer inhabitants. The emphasis Wordsworth gives to his own loving relationship with his sister Dorothy, helps to create a parody of Gaunt's values and an alternative 'view' of history.

characters who people Shakespeare's history plays, and whose height above the ordinary, both linguistically and socially, the poet's reader will not have to ascend to in order to read a tragic tale, but would need to recognise in order to receive greater pleasure, perhaps.

The introduction to the 2002 Arden edition of the play gives a short overview of the contrasting styles of the language which has been interpreted by previous critics as staging the contrast between an older, chivalric order and the emergence of a new age of Machiavellian political pragmatism. The editor, citing John Baxter's analysis of the language of the play in *Shakespeare's Poetic Styles: Verse into Drama* (London, 1980)<sup>303</sup> comments:

*Richard II* effectively contrasts, juxtaposes and combines the plain and the 'golden' style' as Baxter (46–55) points out, [and this] relates to the compositional problem of uniting history (whose purpose is chiefly moral) to tragedy (whose desired effect is to excite emotion). In Baxter's estimation *Richard II*'s range of styles reveals Shakespeare in transition between self-declarative forms of artifice and more subtle forms of expression in which art conceals art.<sup>304</sup>

Wordsworth's plain style in *Michael* is not that of the common ballad used formerly, but a middle style in blank verse, the royal measure, in which 'art conceals art.' The rhetorical features and narrative structure of *Michael*, as several critics have

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<sup>303</sup> John Baxter, *Shakespeare's Poetic Styles: Verse into Drama*, Routledge Library Editions 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980). Quoted in Forker below.

<sup>304</sup> Charles R. Forker, Introduction: Language. *King Richard II*, 3rd Series. Ed. Charles R. Forker. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002. 55-90. *Shakespeare Collection*. Thomson Gale. Accessed 7th Aug. 2007. <http://galegroup.com/shax>. This concealment of the art of the poems is a paradox which Coleridge touches on in *BL*. His attempt to show that the poems were not the 'silly, childish' things the critics and some readers supposed them to be is one reason why the exposition of their art was a contentious issue, as the comment from Wordsworth's letter to his wife on Coleridge's lectures above perhaps suggests. See *BL* II 9-10.

shown is complex. The story is told by two narrators, Michael, and one who now speaks the language of Shakespeare but who tells us it is one of those tales he heard as a child when he was still ‘careless of books.’ This may seem like a denial of the source I am arguing for, but in fact it is not. The ‘flesh and blood’ shepherd of Wordsworth’s story may have been a source for *Michael* but the imaginative *form* of the poem, its rhetorical strategies and symbolic features, (which makes *Michael* a truly symbolic poem in Coleridge’s sense) is to be found in Shakespeare’s play in which his own historical sources including Hollinshed and the play *Woodstock* are given a narrative and thematic structure which relies to a great extent on Biblical sources, the storehouse of the ‘enthusiastic’ imagination of the Preface of 1815.

The use of Biblical allusion and phrasing is well documented by Page in her article, and in her full length study of Wordsworth’s transformation of Biblical sources and characters Deeanne Westbury notes with other critics the association with the sacrifice of Isaac, which are in fact common to the play and the poem.<sup>305</sup> Critical perception of the play as a refashioning of the sacrifice of Christ and of Richard’s murder as ritualistic killing, takes its cue from Bolingbroke’s early declamatory claim that Gloucester’s murder cries out to him, ‘like sacrificing Abel’s’ (I i 104), a shepherd who sacrifices the first born of his flock, for justice. It is Richard himself who compares himself to Christ, and his nobles to Pilates.(IV ii 229-32) Richard’s excessive and ultimately blasphemous claims may be made to elicit sympathetic responses, but he is powerless to effect anything once his divine right as King has been shown to offer no protection to his crown. Bolingbroke’s own self-righteous challenge is also shown to be hollow when he scapegoats and banishes Exton, Richard’s killer, at the end of the play, and washes his own hands of

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<sup>305</sup> Deeanne Westbrook, Wordsworth's Biblical Ghosts, (New York: Palgrave, 2001). 99.

responsibility. The cycle of incitement to murder, banishment to avoid repercussions, and the ultimate seeking of revenge which produces civil war, begins at the beginning with a reference to the first killing.

The obvious Biblical parallelisms in Wordsworth's poem are complicated too by their seeming to be not quite so snug a fit;<sup>306</sup> Wordsworth's 'realism' brings the use of such Biblical parallelisms in the play into question. What is at stake for Wordsworth is essentially the necessity of reclaiming a 'disillusioned' vision which attempts to avoid the 'false description' he eschews in the Preface. The false 'conveyance' implied in the use of metaphor or 'translation' may be arbitrarily imposed by the poet unless it is used to stage that arbitrariness as Shakespeare's play does. The use of the sun trope emblematic of the king's power in *Richard II* is an example which Wordsworth employs to convey Michael's fortitude in the face of loss.<sup>307</sup> The tragic pathos of the loss of his son is unvoiced by Michael; silence conveys the presence of unspoken grief, restaging in more realistic and completely unimpassioned theatrical form Hamlet's claim that he has that 'within which passeth show.' (*Ham* I ii 85). Punning more subtly than Gaunt or Richard, Wordsworth shows us that Michael 'still looked up to sun and cloud,' (456) after Luke's failure to

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<sup>306</sup> Judith Page refers to aspects of the Biblical phraseology used. See also Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Levinson's essay is reprinted from her article "Spiritual Economics: A Reading of Wordsworth's 'Michael'," *ELH* 52 (Fall 1985) 707-31. This is the most thought provoking of new historicist approaches to the poem, and has produced many responses, Mark Scott's essay, being only one. New historicist criticism's fruitful engagement with renaissance and romantic texts, especially Wordsworth's and Shakespeare's, would seem to stem from the two writers' equally nuanced engagement with historical and contextual detail; social and political contingencies. In Wordsworth's case perhaps the reading and imitation of Shakespeare that is evident in his poetry is what makes his work so much more amenable to this critical approach.

<sup>307</sup> See S. K. Heninger, Jr., "The Sun-King Analogy in *Richard II*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11.3 (1960). 319-327. Wordsworth's 'sun' is the natural sun, though the pun works to relate Luke's value to warmth and light rather than Richard's 'glory,' which turns out to be illusory. Michael can still look up to the sun; there is no looking up to monarchical power in the poem, but the metaphor stresses the value of the son as being in excess of what Michael gambles him for.

return.<sup>308</sup> Michael O'Neill's finely perceptive article on *Michael* focuses on ways that the 'artistic vision of *Lyrical Ballads* engages in constantly changing dialogue with its readers,' and is committed to 'laying bare the building and rebuilding of poetic shapes.' O'Neill reads the hint of a pun in the repetition of the word sun, used earlier to describe what the child, Luke, had meant to his old, 'born again' father. His presence gave 'light to the sun and music to the wind.' (212)

The characterisation of Michael is perhaps the most obvious link with Gaunt in that he is simply an old man, a detail 'touched' on by Shakespeare in so many of the plays, but especially here in that the play opens with Richard's directing our attention to it from the start. 'Old John of Gaunt,' may be read as a mockery of the old man by the younger Richard, comparable to the mockery of the old in other plays: Hamlet and Polonius, the Duke and Shylock, Lear's daughters. Gaunt's central multi-role part in the play as uncle and counsellor, (like Michael who is 'apt for all affairs') but subject to King Richard; would be avenger of his brother's death for his widow, the Duchess of Gloucester; and controlling father of a rebellious son, is all gainsaid by the physical reality of his aging body. His own sense of the contrast between his heroic, martial and physically strong past with his present lack of power of any kind is capped and further insulted in his newly perceived identification by Richard, mocking his playing on his name, as only one of *many* 'sick men': 'Can sick men play so dainty with their names?'

Not wanting to be thought of as unjust by others if he had not been party to the banishment of his son, he admits that he knew when he did it that he was 'too strict' and imagined then that he would be criticised for it later:

You urged me as a judge, but I had rather

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<sup>308</sup> See Michael O'Neill, "*Lyrical Ballads* And 'Pre-Established Codes of Decision'." (Trott, 2001). 139.

You would have bid me argue like a father.  
Alas, I looked when some of you should say  
I was too strict to make mine own away,  
But you gave leave to my unwilling tongue  
Against myself to do myself this wrong. ( I iii, 230-35)

This weakness is ultimately defined as a feminine attribute when Aumerle's mother begs on her knees for his pardon. Often thought to be artistically flawed, this burlesque scene stages the complete breakdown of the mask of ceremony and ritual, in a paradoxically ritualistic scene which mocks ritual. Even the language of chivalry is exposed as false when York begs the King to speak French so that the pardon will have no validity, and the king is forced to yield to his Aunt while Aumerle's father, having ridden like a mad-man to overtake him, his boots unceremoniously pulled on to accentuate the disorder, actually prefers to see his son sacrificed than be dishonoured. But the pledge which he has given for Aumerle's loyalty is something he obviously cannot be responsible for, just as Gaunt could not be for Bolingbroke's honesty.

The concept or idea that the Duchess uses of her husband in this scene:

'Oh King, believe not this hard hearted man./Love loving not itself, none other can'  
(5.3. 85-6), is transposed by Wordsworth in describing Michael's love for his wife and son:

The shepherd if he loved himself must needs  
Have loved his helpmate; but to Michael's heart  
This son of his old age was yet more dear.(147-50)

Similarly, the care which Michael bestowed on Luke as a baby is described by Wordsworth as ‘female service,’ an expression dense with multiple meanings connected with work, but which recalls its opposite masculine form, the concept of ‘service’ used in feudal times and still operative today as military service, in the sense of allegiance, fealty; profession of allegiance, or homage.<sup>309</sup>

Old Michael, while he was yet a Babe in arms,  
Had done him female service, not alone  
For dalliance and delight, as is the use  
Of fathers, but with patient mind enforc’d  
To acts of tenderness; and he had rock’d  
His cradle with a woman’s gentle hand. (163-7)

Wordsworth had written to Charles Lamb when he had not responded as enthusiastically as he wished him to to the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* 1800 that he aspired to a ‘certain Union of Tenderness and Imagination, which in the sense he used Imagination was not the characteristic of Shakespeare, but which Milton possessed in a degree far exceeding other Poets.’<sup>310</sup> This disavowal of Shakespeare’s imagination could be read as the kind of ‘renunciation of authority’ which William H. Galperin reads as Wordsworth’s most characteristic and sustained posture.<sup>311</sup> He claimed also that he could have written like Shakespeare ‘if he had a mind to,’ according to Lamb, who wittily remarked, ‘so you see nothing is wanting but the mind.’<sup>312</sup> Wordsworth’s suggestion that Shakespeare’s imagination lacked tenderness, though, is to some degree valid. The kind of sensibility which was ushered in in the age of Sterne is not a feature of Shakespeare’s play where verbal wit and rhetorical

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<sup>309</sup> See Oxford English Dictionary for definitions of ‘service’ which relate to feudal and military terms. Our sense of the term ‘service’ as domestic work usually performed by women did not develop until much later.

<sup>310</sup> *EY* 316

<sup>311</sup> Galperin, 1989, 247.

<sup>312</sup> Quoted in Bate, 1986, 73.

dexterity, and the political pragmatism of the characters dictate the style and the tone of the language. Wordsworth's example of his own combination of imagination and tenderness is given in the letter as when Michael tells Luke, relating 'some little part of our two histories':

—After thou  
First cam's't into the world, as it befalls  
To newborn infants, thou did's't sleep away  
Two days, and blessings from thy Father's tongue  
Then fell upon thee. (349-53).

Michael has the same scruples as Gaunt about sending Luke away; his wife too has similar presentiments to the Queen's for Richard.(III, ii) Both women's fears are as quickly brushed aside though, and Michael acts precipitously in wanting to send Luke away the very night he thinks of the plan which will save his land. Though nearly two weeks pass before he does leave, he is provided with the best clothes that money can buy, a signal that Michael's sense of his identity as a frugal and plain man is already changing, and which hints at the luxury and waste which portended Richard's downfall. Michael's ambitions for his son and the hope that he can retain the land through him are beginning to present themselves in outward show.

The tears which the boy sheds as he is about to go, shadowing Bolingbroke's leave-taking of Gaunt, elicit a response from Michael in which he tells him that though in the past they have been bound 'only by links of love,' he must now make a work alone which they might have made together, asking Luke to lay the first stone of the sheepfold. The previously unspoken bond which the boy had with his father is thus made into a binding oath, a covenant is made between the two in the form of a contract which will be broken.



The Old Testament narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac informs Michael's willing sacrifice of his son, which can be read as a 'prophetic' tragic history. This can, in part, be contrasted with Wordsworth's more expansive New Testament and Miltonic vision, which sees the necessity of self-sacrifice and the nature of the Old Testament covenant as having been superseded by the new relationship with God. In Wordsworth's 'Ode to Duty' 'the spirit of self-sacrifice' (52) – synonymous with Coleridge's 'spirit of the Gospel' – would act according to 'wish' and 'choice' (43-4) just as Wordsworth's 'bondsman' can only submit to 'relationship and love' (Preface, 1802). Gaunt's dismay at the exploitation and dishonourable shaming of England in his nephew's leasing out of the land, for which he rebukes Richard, is echoed by Wordsworth through the various bonds, pledges and mortgages that are evident, as we witness the father in 'Michael' caught between conflicting duties and ties to his land, his immediate family, and his nephew.

The double vision which is such a prominent feature of Shakespeare's plays, is most apparent in *Michael* in the form of the 'spiritual economics' analysed by Marjory Levinson in her Marxist critique of the poem, in which for her, Luke's use value and exchange value is reversed by the end of the poem, and by Mark Jones in his polemical reply to her essay as 'double economics.'<sup>313</sup> I think that both critics are partially right here. The transference from real property ownership to only virtual ownership in the form of 'inky parchment blots' referred to by Gaunt in the play (in the form of a mortgage on the land, and a spiritual covenant between the father and son to keep faith in the poem) does not prevent the plough from going through the land after Michael's death. Both forms of economics have a part in the narrative, but

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<sup>313</sup> See Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays*. For Jones' reply see Mark Jones, "Double Economics: Ambivalence in Wordsworth's Pastoral."

in reading the play with the poem further light is shed on the economics and history of pastoral.

Gaunt's 'pelting farms' and tenements<sup>314</sup> bespeaks some disdain for the people who actually labour on the land, and 'pelting' in itself is a doubling pun meaning both mean and insignificant and pertaining to sheep farms. Albeit that Richard's purpose in enacting exorbitant leases and taking Gaunt's lands and wealth on his death is to raise funds for his expansionist war in Ireland and recoup money wasted on the Italian fashions and the luxurious court he kept, the customary rights of the people were being lost in these new legalised, less permanent tenancies. What had been land usage and proprietorial rights giving virtually permanent possession to Freeman, these new leases changed so that they could be terminated with ease, and higher revenues could be extracted from the new tenants when the rent was increased. King Richard's change of status from protector and guardian of the land to 'landlord of England' made him, as Gaunt says, a 'bond slave to the law' as much as any other man. This diminishes his own independence, already subject to influence from flatterers, as much as Michael's real wealth in and dependence on Luke is wagered, and lost, by the flattering thought of independence from his debts, and the chance of holding on to more land than, as he himself admits, he actually needs.

England to the dying Gaunt is not the land, the 'soil', the 'dust' that emerges at various junctures in the language of the play, most memorably when Richard's prophecy that his divine right as King will be protested by the very land which he figures as his mother and nurse, is played out in the spectacle of the dust which

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<sup>314</sup> *R II*, II i 41-68. Gaunt's speech is a crucial source for many of Wordsworth's 'ideas' in 'Tintern Abbey' as well as in 'Michael'. I use the word ideas to avoid the word imagery, and to suggest a link with Coleridge's use of the word 'idea.' For a detailed survey of the legal terms used in the play, which may also be relevant to the poem, see William O. Scott, "Landholding, Leasing, and Inheritance In 'Richard II'," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 42.2 (2002). 275-292. Wordsworth's father, John Wordsworth, was land agent and legal executive to Lord Lonsdale. Wordsworth was familiar with the law through his lawyer brother, Richard, and his many lawyer friends.

spatters his face as he is led, abject, in the van of Bolingbroke's progress and triumphal procession through London's streets. For Gaunt England is 'a throne of kings,' a 'sceptered isle,' and most misleading of all, its suffering people are a 'breed of happy men,' albeit that none seem happy, and all the women in the play suffer at the hands of these family men.

Bolingbroke's personal triumph is of the type which Luke's mother, aptly named Isabel, the name of Richard's queen, imagines she might also share in if her son can become a successful businessman like his cousin, and within seconds of Michael's persuasive speech that Luke should go, she is dreaming of an earlier and also historically real Lakeland boy made good, Robert Bateman, to whom Wordsworth, (some critics assuming mistakenly) gives the name Richard. The chapel Bateman built, Ing's Chapel, can still be seen, but it was something of an imported glory, paid for by the fruits of his trade as an overseer of his master's 'merchandise/Beyond the seas, where he grew wondrous rich.'<sup>315</sup> Luke's 'procession' as he leaves home shows us a boy as 'bold' and as proud as Bolingbroke as the neighbours flock from the doors to see him off:

Next morning, as had been resolved, the Boy  
Began his journey, and when he had reach'd  
The public Way, he put on a bold face;  
And all the neighbours as he pass'd their doors  
Came forth with wishes and with farewell prayers,  
That followed him 'till he was out of sight.

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<sup>315</sup> For an interpretation which sees the sumptuousness of the chapel as an ironic contrast to Wordsworth's poetic project see James Mulvihill, "Wordsworth's *Michael*," *Explicator* 47.2 (1989). 21-23.

These signposts to the play, as well as many more too numerous for this chapter, together with the almost comically disguised opening lines, point the reader in the direction of *Richard II*, and account for Wordsworth's almost witty contention in the opening section that he writes only for a few 'natural hearts,' but with yet fonder feeling 'for the sake/ Of youthful Poets, who among these Hills/ Will be my second self when I am gone.' (37-39) Given that Wordsworth recommends 'severe thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition' in order to acquire 'an accurate taste in poetry',<sup>316</sup> the latter dedication to youthful poets requires that those former models should be recognised in order for the poem to be fully appreciated.

The stress really ought to be on the word '*my*', not 'second' in that line. As Wordsworth is Shakespeare's second self, he hopes that youthful poets will emulate his spirit in writing of the ordinary, and giving it dignity and in giving imaginative life to people who had no culturally valued voice in poetry. He does not wish to be Michael's heir, as some critics have assumed, he acknowledges he is Shakespeare's, albeit in a much hidden form. He wishes poetry not simply to change, but, as with all revolutions in society, to continue changing, as the mind of man is continually creative, while 'the earth/ On which he dwells,... / ...doth still remain unchanged.'<sup>317</sup> We may now know that that optimism of an unchanging earth is unfounded, but Wordsworth hopes too that future poets will retain something of what he sees at the end of the 1805 version of *The Prelude* in the Snowdon incident as the 'heavenly' source of that imagination which is the mark of an 'original' and historically situated genius:

...the glorious faculty

<sup>316</sup> Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* 1798.

<sup>317</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, XIII 447-450.

Which higher minds bear with them as their own.

This is the very spirit in which they deal

With all the objects of the universe:

They from their native selves can send abroad

Like transformation, for themselves create

A like existence, and, when'er it is

Created for them, catch it as by an instinct.

Them the enduring and the transient both

Serve to exalt. (*The Prelude* 1805, XIII 89-98)

It is sometimes forgotten that this extraordinary passage refers to the greatest poets rather than simply the mind of man which is celebrated at the close of *The Prelude*. To send abroad like 'transformation,' is to be capable of giving to the world not only a transformed vision but transformations of what the poet only in the 1850 version is intent on hearing in that dark abysmal breathing space': 'Its voices issuing forth to silent light/In one continuous stream.'

In the 1850 version, written perhaps after Wordsworth had failed to create the projected *Recluse* based on his stated aims, Wordsworth changed the word 'transformation' to 'mutations.' The failure of the project to give 'visions of man, nature, and society' in an epic poem may have owed less to Wordsworth's sense of his own inadequacy, as to the sheer mastery of Shakespeare's or any other author's, untranslatable, original genius. In 1850 poets still 'for themselves create a like existence' or

...When'er it dawns

Created for them, catch it, or are caught

By its inevitable mastery. (1850, XIV 95-7)

Seamus Heaney is only one of those heirs who, like Joyce, acknowledge a ‘portion’ of their inheritance as being from Wordsworth, and his 2006 *District and Circle* is, in terms of the focus of this chapter, a poignant and allusively compelling collection of poetry in direct ‘line’ of descent from Wordsworth and, therefore, also from Shakespeare.<sup>318</sup> One might almost imagine in the title of the collection, the name of a London tube line, in that ambiguously ‘particular’ focus on place in the word ‘District’ and the abstraction of a ‘circle’, a sheepfold returned, in the perpetually cyclical form of that new ‘species’ of poetry which acknowledges its debt to forebears, yet is rooted in its own place and time, and ‘glorifies’ the common face of earth and her ‘mirth and tears.’ Wordsworth’s ‘common face’ of earth is the face of man (and woman) above all.

‘To Mick Joyce in Heaven’ is a poem whose eponymous hero is not unlike Michael. His deft, measured, keen eyed bricklaying skills, the wondrous weight of his trowel to the boy Heaney, bespeaks his cunning strength, and his tender qualities are revealed in his form of ‘female service,’ his work as a medical orderly in the army. His ‘story’ is recounted in a wonderfully jaunty dactylic which is itself a paean to a real individual whose name, at least, recalls Wordsworth’s poem. All these poems speak of spiritual debts to people and poets, and repaint moments that are spots of time. But they are also poems about the kind of objects which were once deemed trivial, mean, and low by Wordsworth’s critics. ‘Not with a waste of words’ but with

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<sup>318</sup> Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006). Heaney’s volume has poems on Dorothy Wordsworth’s coal scuttle, as well as ‘Wordsworth’s Skates’

not those as seen today in Dove Cottage -  
 Not the bootless runners lying toppled  
 In dust in a display case,  
 Their bindings perished,  
 But the reel of them on frozen Windermere  
 As he flashed from the clutch of earth along its curve  
 And left it scored.

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reverential and hard won respect for the unsung and their own skills, both Heaney and Wordsworth make the lyrical pay homage to the ordinary man and his work.

Wordsworth insisted that a large capital letter should highlight the opening words of the two long sections of the poem following the narrator/chorus's prologue, highlighting orthographically the prepositions which structure the narrative into an exposition of place in part one: 'Upon the forest side in Grasmere Vale/There dwelt a shepherd, Michael was his name.' and time in part two: 'While this good household thus were living on/ From day to day, to Michael's ear there came/Distressful tidings. Long time before the time of which I speak...' Thus the history homely and rude follows the conventional fairy tale opening 'once upon a time.' Wordsworth's printer did not fulfil his wishes on this occasion, but the desire to fulfil Richard's request to Isabel that she should tell his tale by the fireside is in part fulfilled.<sup>319</sup>

Heaney's title poem, 'District and Circle', takes its readers into the hidden world of the London tube line, which, unlike Wordsworth's hidden valley and more like his depiction of London in *The Prelude*, unfolds itself to a swarm of people, noises and voices that are passing and past. An encounter with a blind beggar is staged as the founding imaginative impulse which ushers in Wordsworth's Shakespearean 'turn' to the unvoiced. Amidst the anonymity of the crowds who people the underground/underworld tunnels of Heaney's London a busker plays an Irish whistle, and a glance of mutual recognition unites the poet and the anonymous 'person' where the 'still, sad music of humanity' can still be heard. Heaney encounters his own farmer father's ghostly face in his own aging face, mirrored in the window. The poem's closing lines, to the imagined noise of a literal means of transport, echo Wordsworth's words in *The Prelude* which tell of how, on days and

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<sup>319</sup> Wordsworth's stories involve much meaner characters than the king, and as Bate suggests above, involve a shift of focus from the high to the low, or, as in Michael's case, the middle ground.

nights when storm and rain beat on his roof, his spirit is brought back, transported like a changeling, to the 'feelings' he had by the side of 'a blasted hawthorn,' a 'naked wall' and a 'single sheep,' as he waited for his father and the horses that would carry him home.<sup>320</sup>

And so by night and day to be transported  
Through galleried earth with them, the only relict  
Of all that I belonged to, hurtled forward,  
Reflecting in a window mirror-backed  
By blasted weeping rock-walls.

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<sup>320</sup> See *The Prelude* 1805, XI 335-388.



## Chapter 7 Comic Transformations in *Biographia Literaria*

### 1. Translation, or Plagiarism?

When Wordsworth wrote *Michael* and disassociated himself from the kind of supernatural poetry that Coleridge tells us he had aspired to write for the partnership, he effectively divorced himself from the project which we are told was to be the joint work of the two poets. Although he still relied on Coleridge to supply the formal philosophical framework of his great projected work, *The Recluse*, the ‘amalgamation’ that had been feared by Thomas Poole and others did not take place in Germany.<sup>321</sup> But neither did the marriage of the two minds produce the body of work which together they might have created once they were both living in the Lake District. The divergences which surfaced first in 1800, and came to a head in 1802, are hinted at but never explained in Coleridge’s famous letter to Sotheby in which those ‘radical differences’ are first mooted.<sup>322</sup> But we should remember that these are differences which he intends to ‘get to the Bottom of.’ This getting to the bottom of things is part of the ensuing problem which set Coleridge off on his metaphysical researches into the nature of the human mind, and especially the role and functions of the imagination. The final product of that search seems to have been *Biographia Literaria* in which Coleridge both asserts his differences of opinion from Wordsworth, and yet extols his powers as the great imaginative poet that he is. How he does that with the help of Shakespeare is the argument I propose to develop in this chapter.

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<sup>321</sup> ‘The Wordsworths have left you — so there is an end to our fear about amalgamation, etc. ... it was right ... provided you are where *pure German* is spoken.’ See this letter, and others from Thomas Poole to Coleridge in M. E. Sandford, *Thomas Poole and His Friends*, (1888), New edition. With a new introduction by Reginald Watters ed. (Over Stowey, Somerset: David Worthy at the Friarn Press, 1996). 150.

<sup>322</sup> *CL* II 459. See also chapter one, on the importance of the human heart and the necessity of combining the poet’s heart *and* intellect with the ‘great appearances of Nature.’

The great paradox of *Biographia Literaria* is Coleridge's inexplicable plagiarisms of Schelling and, to a lesser extent, of Maas and other German writers. He not only gives his readers the names of his sources but also blithely discourses on plagiarism itself in the very book in which his most flagrant use of it has been so widely condemned. He then begins a chapter which he does not appear to finish and announces a forthcoming philosophical treatise which is never completed. Coleridge would appear to flout all the rules of classical rhetoric which Michel Beaujour in *Poetics of the Literary Self- Portrait* sees at play in Leiris' *La Reigle du Jeu*:

For it is possible that Leiris' topics of invention ....are the fallacious arguments, or *elenchi* against which Francis Bacon intended to arm the readers of his *Essays*. These are suspicious but damned useful topics, without which a self portrait — among other works — could never be written. An enumeration of these topics includes:

1. To conclude an argument, as though one had completed one's reasoning, without having in fact, effected this reasoning.
2. To play on words having illogical, fortuitous similarities.
3. To state something about the whole that is true about certain parts only, and *vice versa*.
4. To become indignant.
5. To use a single unrepresentative example.
6. To take the accidental for the essential.
7. To argue from a consequence.
8. To argue *post hoc*, *propter hoc*.
9. To ignore crucial circumstances.

10. By deceptively confusing the particular and the general, to delude one into believing that the improbable is probable, and *vice versa*.<sup>323</sup>

This is near enough to what Coleridge appears to do in chapter XIII. The self-portrait he offers his readers, together with the philosophical argument he is purported to have made is perhaps then not to be taken so seriously as has been made out. Let us not forget either, that each of the statements in the famous distinction between imagination and fancy takes the form of a conjecture: 'I consider... I hold...'<sup>324</sup> The argument is not an argument, it is simply a series of opinions and that is precisely what we are told to expect in the title: *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*.

Coleridge takes the letter, if not the spirit, of his subtitle from Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*.<sup>325</sup> Peter Conrad tells us that 'Shandyism... refers to a character and a form: to an inspirationally erratic individual and the chaotic structure he inhabits.'<sup>326</sup> The immethodical miscellany which Coleridge offers his readers is meant to follow the associationist pattern of Sterne's erratic, wandering prose style.'

Seamus Perry draws out the attractions Coleridge found in this kind of formal muddle: 'The zigzagery of Coleridgean prose in its sprightlier mode is the self-delightingly comic enactment of his shifting imaginative life, a formal embodiment of

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<sup>323</sup> Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 262.

<sup>324</sup> 'The IMAGINATION then I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent... The secondary I consider as an echo of the former... FANCY ... is indeed no other than a mode of memory.' *BL* I 304-05. Note how imagination is less definable or defined than fancy is. Coleridge seems sure of himself on that count. He has after all given a good account of association in the preceding chapters and seems to have got to the 'bottom' of that, but not so imagination.

<sup>325</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>326</sup> Peter Conrad, *Shandyism: The Character of Romantic Irony* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). Preface, vii.

muddle.’<sup>327</sup> For Perry, Coleridgean muddle extends into his divided philosophical and aesthetic allegiances between the claims of idealism and of a variously and stubbornly resistant realism, suggesting that Coleridge’s earlier opinions often resurface in his work, in places where they are no longer supposed to be acceptable. Opinions, however, as Sterne comically shows can be picked up and discarded again, they can, quite simply, change. What is more, if an argument has not been reasoned and systematically deduced is it not simply a fancy? Coleridge consistently makes such charges against Schelling in his marginalia.<sup>328</sup> At one point, asking if Schelling’s system is not merely a ‘philosophising dream,’ Coleridge suggests that this has been his interpretation of at least some of Schelling’s philosophy for some time.

The book-binder has docked my former notes; but I  
understand enough to find that my first impressions  
were the same as my present are: after repeated perusal,  
and too strong a pre-possession. It is a mere Day-dream  
= somnium philosophans!<sup>329</sup>

If, as I suggest, Coleridge and Wordsworth were influenced by Shakespeare to a greater extent than has been acknowledged, and particularly by *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, what better way to stage the influence of a theory than by a dream vision, to re-stage the dream that influenced the theory. What better way than to

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<sup>327</sup> Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). 101. Concurring with T. S. Eliot’s admiration of Coleridge’s style, Perry finds Eliot’s characterisation of the ‘vital challenge’ of Coleridge’s parenthetic prose ‘especially happy, as it brings us back to ideas of ‘life’ and the way that, in Coleridge’s thought, as in his style, the life of the whole is always ready to dissociate into parts with a life of their own – be they Coleridgean parentheses, cosmic energies, or bits of turtles.’

<sup>328</sup> See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 12. *Marginalia*, Bollingen Series 75, eds. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, 6 vols. (London; Princeton, NJ: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1980). IV, 355. ‘I vehemently suspect a play on words here [-] that which one calls Seeing, Sensuality the other calls Thinking, Fancying- yet both mean the same. Does Schelling pretend to have no consciousness of Quantity, Quality, Relation, Mode?’ The editors of this volume of marginalia note that verbal misunderstanding is a repeated theme in Coleridge’s commentaries on the supposed differences between Schelling, Fichte and Kant.

<sup>329</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, (London; Princeton, NJ: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1980). IV, 431.

imitate, to re-create rather than copy, a primary source? After all, copying a primary source would be tantamount to plagiarism, appropriation or stealing. Like Hamlet's letter above, the forgery would be a 'changeling.'<sup>330</sup>

The paradox of Coleridge's plagiarisms has resulted in Coleridge being condemned as either a hopelessly confused opium addict, unable to distinguish between his own ideas and what he read and later annotated; a flagrant thief who took advantage of the general ignorance of German metaphysics in England and hoped his readers would not notice the theft; or the plagiarisms are rather weakly defended as being due to his own peculiar mosaic method of composition. Thomas McFarland exemplifies the difficulties of reconciling what Coleridge says and what he actually does in *Biographia Literaria* in his citation of the long paragraph in which Coleridge attempts to defend himself.

In Schelling's 'Natur Philosophie', and the 'System des Transcendentalen Idealismus,' I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do... It would be out of mere justice to myself, were I to warn my future readers, that an identity of thought, or even similarity of phrase, will not be at all times a certain proof that the passage has been borrowed from Schelling, or that the conceptions were originally learnt from him. In this instance, as in the dramatic lectures of Schlegel... from the same motive of self defence against the charge of plagiarism, many of the most striking resemblances, indeed all of the main and fundamental ideas were born and matured in my own mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German philosopher; and I might indeed affirm with truth,

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<sup>330</sup> See chapter one on Coleridge's *Treatise on Method*.

before the more important works of Schelling had been written, or at least made public. Nor is this coincidence at all to be wondered at. We had studied in the same school; been disciplined by the same preparatory philosophy, namely the writings of Kant; we had both equal obligations to the polar logic and dynamic philosophy of Giordano Bruno; and Schelling has lately, and, as of recent acquisition, allowed that same affectionate reverence for the labours of Behmen, and other mystics which I had formed at a much earlier period... Whether a work is the offspring of a man's own spirit, and the product of original thinking, will be discovered by those who are its sole legitimate judges, by better tests than the mere reference to dates. For readers in general, let whatever shall be found in this or any other future work of mine, which resembles, or coincides with, the doctrines of my German predecessor, though contemporary, be wholly attributed to him: provided, that the absence of distinct references to his books, which I could not at all times make with truth as designating citations or thoughts actually derived from him; and which I trust, would after this generous acknowledgment be superfluous, be not charged on me as an ungenerous concealment or intentional plagiarism.<sup>331</sup>

McFarland comments:

The curious mixture of frankness and of plain deceit in this passage leads us, if we examine it even briefly, into a veritable labyrinth of paradox. It may be useful to map a few of the psychological and logical mazes we find there. First: Coleridge argues his own originality but at the same time criticizes the conception of originality

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<sup>331</sup> *BL* I 161-4.

and offers to attribute all similarities exclusively to Schelling..<sup>332</sup>

He goes on to argue strongly, yet bewildered by his need to plagiarise at all, that Coleridge's relationship to Schelling was one of 'radical opposition.' This may be putting the case too strongly. Certainly Coleridge himself acknowledges his debt to Schelling in *Biographia* as well as to Kant, but he expresses his initial doubts about Kant rather obscurely. Given the Shandean connection one could be forgiven for a comic reading, or a ludicrous Shakespearean/Shandean quibble on the 'thing in itself,' in which Schelling's interpretation is staged as a translation which is unfaithful to its source. Taking the letter for the spirit, which is included in the title of this section, as 'The Letter Versus The Spirit of Kant,' the fatal Cleopatra of the pun would certainly admit confusion into the pure doctrine of Kant. The 'thing in itself' Kant's 'ding an sich' becomes in Schelling's hands, not so much the noumena of Plato as the 'nous' of common sense. He becomes a literal interpreter rather like Bottom, whose name itself is a pun on both the literal and the metaphorical use of the word base, ground, foundation and, of course, ass or arse.

Coleridge amusingly comments on this propensity to punning in scholastic logicians, and particularly in his old schoolmaster Boyer, that first disciplinarian of his mind mentioned in chapter I of *Biographia* (BL 8-13), who, in echoing or bringing to mind, Theseus to Hermia, effectively demands that the would be poet fit his fancies to his tutor's judgement. This opening chapter of the book has Coleridge also comparing his use of 'double epithets' in his first published poems to Shakespeare's and Milton's early work. The opportunity to make the analogy work for the

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<sup>332</sup> Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). 39.

‘character’ of the young poet in general is taken in order to ‘fit his own fancy’ to Shakespeare’s, through the modifying or translating power of imagination.

Thes. For you fair Hermia look you arm yourself

To fit your fancies to your father’s will.<sup>333</sup>

In annotating Baxter in his marginalia we find him writing:

Baxter like most scholastic logicians had a sneaking affection for puns. The cause is: the necessity of attending to the primary sense of words, i.e. the visual image or general relation exprest, & which remains common to all the after senses, however widely or even incongruously differing from each other in other respects. ‘you must lay it in at the Tail before you can get it in at the Head.’<sup>334</sup>

Getting it in at the tail in Boyer’s sense meant beating it in soundly on the bottom, in our own case the need to pay attention to the visual images conjured in the mind by, often abstract, words. But the comic potentiality of Kant in this immethodical associationist play of words comes from a source which is Coleridge when least himself:

I never could believe, it was possible for him to have meant no more by his *Noumenon* or THING IN ITSELF, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole *plastic* power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the *materiale* of our sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable. I entertained doubts

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<sup>333</sup> *MND* I i 117-18. Boyer’s practice was to repeatedly demand that the similes and metaphors used by his pupils should be suited to their context, be logical, and not simply clichés.

<sup>334</sup> Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 12. *Marginalia*. I 354. This edition referred to as *CCM* in subsequent citations.



likewise whether in his own mind, he even laid *all* the stress, which he appears to do, on the moral postulates.

An idea in the highest sense of the word cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*; and except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction.<sup>335</sup>

What follows the passage above is a quotation, in Greek symbols, from Pindar.

Untranslated, it remains only marks on paper to those who cannot, as Coleridge explains next, ‘pierce through this symbolic husk,’ to understand that it means ‘he spoke to the wise.’ Whatever Coleridge means by this suggestive introduction to Kant, it is in fact one of his plagiarisms of Schelling, slightly paraphrased, and with additions like the quotation from Pindar above, which is not in Schelling, so that we ought to be alert to the possibilities of a humorous spirit at work here; a mischievous sprite, Puck-like, ready to do the work of imagination and to act as an *agent* of perception in fact, but liable to lead us directly into a comic perception of the relationship between imagination and fancy. Following this Schellingian statement, weaving his words with Schelling’s, Coleridge then slips into the idealist’s tracts almost seamlessly; he translates him, and by way of that metempsychosis, himself.<sup>336</sup> In a comic representation of the identification of reader with writer, Coleridge exemplifies imagination at work in one of its many forms. Now if the imagination is, according to Coleridge in volume II, the soul, what has happened to Coleridge? Is he not away with the fairies, a changeling?

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<sup>335</sup> *BL* I 155-56

<sup>336</sup> See *BL* II 16. The poet ‘in ideal perfection brings the whole soul of man into activity.’ If the will is not in control then the soul seems to be at risk of being taken in, taken over, or stolen by another. Bewitched and as spellbound as the wedding guest in *The Ancient Mariner*, the soul or imagination can become passive: ‘The Mariner hath his will’ (16). I use metempsychosis as it is used in Pythagoras’ speech in Ovid’s *metamorphoses*. See David Hopkins chapter, ‘Dryden and his Contemporaries’, on Dryden’s use of Pythagoras’ speech from book XIV of *Metamorphoses* in his Preface, and in his translation of it, in *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700). Dryden uses Pythagoras’s ‘punning use of *translation*’ as a figure for the transmigration of souls, and ‘for the very process by which [Pythagoras’ words] are being communicated to English readers, translation.’ (Gillespie and Hopkins, 2005). 64.

In the opening note in his marginalia to the ‘copy D’ Shakespeare, mostly written around the period 1817-19, Coleridge makes even alluding to Shakespeare or Cervantes’s wit an act akin to wit itself, uncannily like the secondary imagination, an ‘echo of the former.’

In Shakespeare and Cervantes it is wit so precious that it becomes wit even to quote or allude to it. Thus Sterne is a secondary wit of this order – and how many a Sterne-tertiaries, quartaries &c? <sup>337</sup>

Having, as Coleridge mentions in a letter to Green in 1818, already pointed out Schelling’s borrowings to him before *Biographia* was published, it would appear to me to have been a deliberate ploy to use him. Coleridge explains that he ‘adopted’ Schelling’s system in his ‘literary life’ not realising that he was ‘putting the candle horizontally and burning it at both ends.’<sup>338</sup> This is exactly what the Widow Wadman determines to do in her meeting with Uncle Toby: ‘And so to make sure of both systems, Mrs. Wadman predetermined to light my uncle Toby neither at this end or that; but like a prodigal’s candle, to light him, if possible, at both ends at once.’<sup>339</sup> Schelling fits the bill too for drawing attention to an irritability and disdain for the non-philosophic mind, which the editors of *Biographia* point out,

appeared often in German discussions of the critical philosophy, especially with repeated frequency in Fichte and Schelling.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 12. *Marginalia*, Bollingen Series 75, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (London; Princeton, NJ: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton University Press, 1980). IV 779.

<sup>338</sup> *CL* IV 874.

<sup>339</sup> Sterne, (Oxford, 1983) 406.

<sup>340</sup> *BL* I 236n.

It seems clear too, that the ‘adoption’ is utilised to coincide with the period referred to in chapter IV when Coleridge met Wordsworth.<sup>341</sup> It is also the point at which they both met Thelwall in person for the first time.

The irritability of poets was first mentioned by Jeffrey in his pamphlet answering Thelwall’s irritated and abusive rejoinder to the critic’s review of his poetry and the play, *The Fairy of the Lake*.<sup>342</sup>

The series of digressions which lead us back to that point, via Coleridge’s comical account of his *Watchman* days, as a ‘tradesman’ in literature; his admission of having taken a wrong direction in *not* entering the church, as Sterne *had* done, and the curious advantage the cleric’s profession affords in taking him out of the company, not simply of his wife but of his household, allows us to see the would be

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<sup>341</sup> The editors of *Biographia* also make this point but see little narrative connectivity in the intervening chapters apart from Coleridge’s reading of Kant, Schelling and other German metaphysicians between 1800 and 1815.

<sup>342</sup> See Art. XXI. ‘Thelwall’s Poems.’ *The Edinburgh Review*, (April, 1803), 197-202, for the review of Thelwall’s 1801 poems, republished in 1802. John Thelwall, Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement: 1801, Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989). Jeffrey is dismissive of Thelwall’s ‘Prefatory Memoir’ in the book, but in fact is not so scathing of the poetry. He mentions the drinking song which celebrates C-W-R-W in *The Fairy of the Lake* in particular. Jeffrey makes no mention of ‘Lines Written near Bridgewater’, which names many of the Stowey circle, including Poole and ‘my Samuel’, but hides Wordsworth and Dorothy’s names under more respectful guises. He accuses Thelwall of being overly ‘irritable’ in the memoir. For Thelwall’s infuriated, though witty, reply see John Thelwall, A Letter to Francis Jeffrey, Esq., on Certain Calumnies and Misrepresentations in the Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh: John Thelwall, 1804). Jeffrey replied with his own wittier pamphlet. Francis Jeffrey, Observations on Mr Thelwall’s Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh: Francis Jeffrey, 1804). The final rejoinder from Thelwall included the lines on the sallow faced lawyer from Wordsworth’s ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ on the front page, after he had sent his first pamphlet to and received a reply with suggestions for the second from Wordsworth. John Thelwall, Mr Thelwall’s Reply to the Calumnies, Misrepresentations, and Literary Forgeries Contained in the Anonymous Observations on the Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review; with a Further Exposition of the Ungrammatical Ignorance of the Writers and Vindicators of That Defamatory Journal. (Glasgow: John Thelwall, 1804). In *Biographia* Coleridge goes to some lengths to justify the ‘irritability’ of ‘the poet’, when the man, not merely the poetry is castigated. Wordsworth too emphatically supports Thelwall in a letter to him, (EY, 431) and refutes any suggestion that the four poets, including Lamb and Southey, should be classed as the founders of the ‘lake school.’ They were dubbed as such by Jeffrey in his review of Southey’s *Thalaba* in *The Edinburgh Review* of October 1802. Though I have not followed the line in this thesis, it could be argued that this exchange with the irritated Thelwall, and its aftermath, resulted in Jeffrey bearing a pretended grudge against Wordsworth, assuming he was involved in the writing of the pamphlets, or at least approved of them. The failure of Wordsworth’s poetry to achieve popular success could be put down to the invective of the reviewer, according to Coleridge, and this would not have been warranted.

‘ideal’ poet as being something of a tradesman in another profession or trade, who can take a holiday from his work when the occasion permits, perhaps even meeting with his mistress, the muse, on these occasional breaks. The description of Coleridge the actual literary tradesman, as editor of *The Watchman*, fainting and falling into a ‘swoon’ after smoking too much tobacco during his salesman’s journey to the North, has him waking up, in a dazzle of light, ‘rubbing [his] eyes’, and declaring to his audience of amused tradesmen companions that he believes no Christian should read newspapers:

This remark so ludicrously inapposite to, or rather incongruous with, the purpose, for which I was known to have visited Birmingham, and to assist me in which they were all met, produced an involuntary and general burst of laughter; and seldom indeed have I passed so many delightful hours, as I enjoyed in that room from the moment of that laugh to an early hour the next morning.<sup>343</sup>

This waking up and rubbing his eyes parallels Bottom’s waking and confusedly stating the opposite of what he means to say, in misquoting St Paul, having apparently fallen asleep after he and his companions were ‘all met’ to rehearse their play. Rubbing his own eyes is what the author of the letter from a friend in chapter thirteen declares he will not promise to do, if he wants to be able to ‘see’ the visions, ‘the sparks and figured flashes’ which Coleridge’s future book on the ‘CONSTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY’ is supposed to ask him to call up himself, rather than to provide them for him.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> *BL I* 182-83. See also pages 302-304 for the letter from a friend.

<sup>344</sup> See the note-book entry below, in which Seamus Perry also sees an analogy with Coleridge and Wordsworth’s relationship: ‘instead of the interpenetration of love, two joining as one yet remaining two, there is absorption, one swallowing up the other; and this, interestingly, is a fate he came to see himself sharing with Dorothy, that other exemplary feminine creature of sensibility, ‘a Woman of

The digression or sidetracking, eventually brings us also to the admonition that objections from conscience to either entering the church or marrying, (Coleridge's prose does not allow us to distinguish the two,) should be listened to with suspicion. The youthful objector should ascertain, 'whether other influences may not be at work; whether spirits, 'not of health,' and with 'whispers not from heaven' may not be walking in the twilight of his consciousness.'<sup>345</sup>

These little sprites, arriving just before his adoption of and by Schelling, and followed by a chapter of requests and 'premonitions' would surely indicate that our Shandean narrator is well aware of the source of that potentially unhealthy and possibly devilish influence he is about to encounter, or is it a re-encounter?

Coleridge's comment that Sterne's comic masterpiece entailed just such a risqué 'dallying with the devil' is made in the notes for his lectures on wit and humour given after he had, none-the-less, attempted his own partly Shandy inspired literary life.<sup>346</sup>

Chapter IX itself closes with a curt reminder that he has treated sufficiently 'this unpleasant subject in an earlier chapter,' that being chapter II on the 'Supposed Irritability of Genius.' The allusions to *Hamlet*, however, have brought us back to Shakespeare and to one of the uses of the supernatural in poetry, as figures or fancies which the poet's pen can 'body forth', not only of the metaphysical properties of consciousness, but of the unconscious promptings of an errant desire. The comic possibilities of irritability are put to use here in the juxtaposition of what Coleridge

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Genius' who "but for the absorption of her whole Soul in her brothers fame and writings would, perhaps, in a different style have been as great a Poet as Himself.' (Letters, VI:959). Perry, (1999), 179-80.

<sup>345</sup> BL I 229-30. Noted by the editors: 'Shakespeare *Hamlet* I iv 40-1: "Be thou a spirit of health or a goblin damned, Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell.'" Wordsworth did not marry Annette Vallon, the mother of his child, or enter the church when he had the opportunity. See Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). 52-67. For Wordsworth's affair with Annette Vallon see Émile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon*, Rev. and enl. ed. (London; Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967).

<sup>346</sup> Alan B. Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, The Critical Heritage Series. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974). 354.

later defines as the 'true metaphysics,' (Christianity) and marriage; a marriage of minds which ought to ensure successful or fruitful creation, but is perhaps to be thwarted by a union characterised by dissent and separation, or radical differences.

One of Shakespeare's constant themes, marriage and marital dissent, is dramatised in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the quarrel between Oberon and Titania for the possession of the changeling boy, the human child orphaned by his mother's death whose surrogate mother will foster his imagination, or is it his fancy? What Oberon and Titania might represent are the kinds of powers which Wordsworth stages as having fostered his own imagination in *The Prelude*, and which he stages in the form of his relationship with Nature.

It may well be that Leigh Hunt's theory that Imagination deals with tragedy and Fancy with comedy is pertinent here, if only because Titania accuses Oberon of stirring up hatred and 'revenge' by his 'brawls.' And despite his desire that the changeling boy should 'range the ' with him, and not be confined to the valley bottoms with Titania, perhaps the wider vantage point and its potential or prophetic vision of tragedy is one of imagination's advantages as a 'higher power.'<sup>347</sup>

The metaphors used in the play to figure these differing perspectives is staged in the scene in which Theseus and Hypolita ascend the mountain to listen to the voices of the hounds, as they hope to listen to the 'musical confusion/Of hounds and echo in conjunction,' whose 'cries' and 'chiding' in the valley beneath them make 'so musical a discord.'<sup>348</sup> This is the aestheticising vision of tragedy, which can make poetry, and

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<sup>347</sup> See *Biographia* chapter 12 for Coleridge's long and, as he himself later admitted, illogical, extended metaphor on the source of imagination, or of the rivers of the mind, being deeper than the soundings taken of the rivers in the vales, and at the foot of waterfalls in the hills of the landscape, but 'far higher and far inward' as an 'undercurrent' of feeling which directs and drives the mind itself. *BL* I 238-240. See also editors' note 1, for Coleridge's description of the passage as containing 'so many hydrostatic bulls' that he was ashamed of it. I am not so sure if the bulls were not intended to be such, though.

<sup>348</sup> *MND* IV I 115-116.

take aesthetic pleasure in, such violent pursuits.<sup>349</sup> It also makes the contradictions of the symbolic in poetry a matter of reconciling opposites, which only needs an imaginative perceiver to make them harmonious.<sup>350</sup>

Theseus and Hypolita are each influenced by Oberon and Titania at different periods in their (fictional) pasts.<sup>351</sup>

Tita. But that forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,

Your buskin'd mistress and your warrior love

To Theseus must be wedded.

Obe. How can you glance at my credit with Hypolita,

Knowing I know your love to Theseus?

Though Oberon is associated with pastoral (Phileda and Corin) rather than tragedy at this point, he accuses Titania of being the cause of Theseus breaking faith with Perigouna, Aegles, and Antiopa.

As staging 'fancy' rather than 'true love,' she could be said to be what Wordsworth names 'fancy' as: this 'adulterate power' merely 'grafted upon feelings of imagination.'<sup>352</sup> Linking fancy 'which 'turned itself instinctively to human passions' in this passage, Wordsworth thus underlines the inconstancy of the emotions and Fancy's lack of fidelity. Wordsworth reconfigures these contending powers as danger

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<sup>349</sup> For a contemporary critical view of the tragic vision and aesthetic pleasure see Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003).. Eagleton echoes Wordsworth in commenting on the Kantian sublime. and our failure to measure up to the dictates of the Law. 'In falling short of the Law or the Absolute, we acknowledge our affinity with it, recognizing that our only true dwelling place is within its own homelessness'. 176. This is an echo of Wordsworth's Alpine recognition of imagination's, or the soul's, 'glory' and ultimate homelessness except with 'infinite' in *The Prelude* 1805, VI 525-42. Eagleton, like Wordsworth, sees 'hope' as the other side of sublime tragic vision in Shakespeare.

<sup>350</sup> Wordsworth's 'Simon Lee' can make this imaginative response to the sound of the hounds, at which '...his heart rejoices; / For when the chiming hounds are out / He dearly loves their voices.' 47-48.

<sup>351</sup> *MND* I i 70-76.

<sup>352</sup> 'This adulterate power'. *The Prelude* 1805, VIII 592. 'Thus sometimes were the shapes of /Wilful fancy grafted upon feelings/Of the imagination, and they rose/In worth accordingly'. 583-86.The editors of the Norton edition read this as Wordsworth suggesting imagination is 'the root stock upon which fancies have been grafted.' Norton *Prelude*, (1979) 296, n2.

and desire, as well as the sublime and the beautiful in *The Prelude*. Whatever they represent, a reconciliation is the ultimate end of the plot.

What, though, if they were read as simply representing imagination and fancy staged as natural and supernatural powers? Where would that lead us? To the creation of a more inclusive poetry, perhaps. What Coleridge warns against in this section of *Biographia* is the possibility of separation based on unnecessary dissent, or the too inclusive absorption of one by the other. At this point in the narrative the ‘general reader’ might well be perplexed. We should be aware, however, that if the only *just* critic of *Biographia*, the real intended reader, was indeed Wordsworth, then only Wordsworth would understand the relevance of including it, especially if the importance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to Wordsworth and Coleridge remained unacknowledged. It is certainly the oddest of omissions that there is hardly a mention of the play itself in Coleridge’s or Wordsworth’s many references to Shakespeare, especially in *Biographia*, except in the instances which this thesis has presented and yet it is the one play which does stage imagination and fancy in all its guises.

In the same volume of Shakespeare which opens with the reference to wit in Sterne, Coleridge asserts his priority against Wordsworth’s claims:

though from motives which I do not know or impulses  
which I *cannot* know, he has thought it proper to assert  
that Schlegel and the German critics [[/were] first taught  
English men to admire their own great country men  
intelligently.’<sup>353</sup>

This marginal note dates Coleridge’s reading to the period of the 1815 Preface in which Wordsworth actually also refers to Coleridge’s lectures of 1811-12 in which he discussed Shakespeare’s sonnets. In reminding us at the end of chapter XII, in

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<sup>353</sup> CCM IV 836 .



which Schelling's voice predominates, of Wordsworth's strictures in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 against the use of fancy, and of his choosing to advertise his objections to Coleridge's definition of fancy in so public a manner, Coleridge brings Wordsworth and the reader directly to one of the main motivations for attempting to make the distinction. The disputed definition must have had deeply personal implications for Coleridge for him to have taken up the gauntlet in such an equally public manner:

Mr Wordsworth's 'only objection is that the definition is too general. To aggregate and associate to evoke and combine, belong as well to the imagination as the fancy.' I reply, that, if by the power of evoking and combining, Mr W. means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and the associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination; and I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of fancy with the imagination for the operation of the latter singly. A man may work with two very different tools at the same moment; each has its share in the work, but the work effected by each is distinct and different. But it will probably appear in the next chapter, that deeming it necessary to go back much further than Mr Wordsworth's subject required or permitted, I have attached a meaning to both fancy and imagination, which he had not in view, at least while he was writing that preface. He will judge.<sup>354</sup>

Seamus Perry reminds us that 'When Coleridge and Wordsworth began their most intense creative relationship, they were both aspiring playwrights, each discovering the difficulty of producing 'one scene conceived and expressed in the

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<sup>354</sup> BL I 294.

Shakespearean idiom' (*CC Table Talk*, II:202 ).<sup>355</sup> Though, as he rightly says, many of the poems are 'dramatised monologues', or 'monodramas', I have argued throughout this thesis that the influence of Shakespeare on the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads* is more complex than merely this choice of dramatic form. Coleridge's own account of the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads* notes that his endeavours were to be:

directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.<sup>356</sup>

Here in Coleridge's shadowplay of the imagination we can trace Theseus's words in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'The best of these are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.'<sup>357</sup> Elements of the supernatural plays, particularly *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are deftly transformed by Coleridge into *The Ancient Mariner* and *The Nightingale* respectively; elements of the latter play by Wordsworth into *The Prelude* of 1797-98 and *Peter Bell*. Those often marginalized in Shakespeare, the mad, the abject, the poor, the dispossessed, are foregrounded in *Lyrical Ballads*. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are re-staged in humbler settings and situations, the linking theme being the lunatic, the lover and poet, as well as superstition.

The original models for Coleridge's transformational aesthetic in *Biographia*, in which he sketches his changing philosophical and religious opinions by employing comic digressions, would appear to be partly Shakespeare and partly *Tristram Shandy*,

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<sup>355</sup> Perry, (1999), 258.

<sup>356</sup> *BL* II 6.

<sup>357</sup> *MND* V i 211-12.

whose Yorrick is even less than a bit part in *Hamlet*, and which itself produced a spate of imitators both here and in Germany in the form of the Bildungsroman.<sup>358</sup>

Wordsworth's comment in the 1815 Preface that continental critics were the first to fully appreciate Shakespeare would, therefore, be received by Coleridge as more than a slight. In giving more credit to the Germans Wordsworth was either playing with fire, forgetful, or simply inconsiderate. Coleridge's notebooks attest to this, and suggest that he thought Wordsworth capable of actually forgetting where his ideas came from. The exasperated note, written in 1815, possibly in response to Wordsworth's Preface, provides some clue to or motivation for Coleridge's wholesale re-adoption of Schelling's pantheistic theories in *Biographia*:

and from the same the *strange* feeling, ( strange to whom the force of self vorticity is not, or imperfectly, known ) his belief, that every thought or even image coincident with one of his own *must* have been borrowed from him < in short, > + Debts forgotten, and the very air of intellects respired by another a Debt to *him!* – In so truly great a mind... This could not have been A = A, had it not been fostered in reclusion in the lap of blind, shall I not say, hatched by the lightless stove of *She-pansy*. I would almost wager my life, that if [Wordsworth] published [ the poem about his own mind] he would cancel all the passages relating to [ STC ] as instances of mutual interpenetration of 2 + 1. The Love of Wisdom = the Wisdom of Love.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> See Peter Conrad on this development, who sees the main problem for eighteenth century writers trying to emulate Shakespeare as the difficulty of reproducing the tragi-comic vision of the plays. Conrad, *Shandyism: The Character of Romantic Irony*. (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>359</sup> CN III 4243.

Writing, in *Biographia*, about Schelling's abusive pamphlet against Fichte, Coleridge transfers the last phrase above, used of Wordsworth, directly to his criticism of Schelling:

...the spirit of which was to *my* feelings painfully incongruous with the principles, and which (with the usual allowance afforded to an antithesis ) displayed the love of wisdom rather than the wisdom of love. I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist: I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible.<sup>360</sup>

That the note-book entry is prior to Coleridge's letter to Green of 1818 above, is itself worthy of note. One must also begin to wonder whose voice is being ventriloquised here, since the only other reference to ventriloquism is made negatively to Wordsworth's practice in *The Excursion* in Volume II:

Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, when in truth one man only speaks.<sup>361</sup>

This reference to ventriloquism had in fact been one of the earliest, if not the only form, in which Coleridge writes of what the two poets were actually attempting to do in the poetry produced by their collaborations of 1797-1802, in the suitably comic poem 'A Soliloquy of the Full Moon, She being in a Mad Passion.' In this decidedly dramatic and 'passionate' poem the figure of the moon is not unlike the angry Titania, determined to assert her rights against the interference of

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<sup>360</sup> *BL* I 237.

<sup>361</sup> *BL* II 135 .

‘transmogrifying’ poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. These ‘ventriloquogusty/ Poets’ as Perry notes, have ‘chang’d’ her:

...especially a wretched pair called Wordsworth and Coleridge: Wordsworth to a little canoe, as in ‘Peter Bell’ (17, Wordsworth, 92) – ‘dear William’s Sky Canoe,’ from ‘Letter to Sara Hutchinson’ (41). This is metaphor as the bad spell of the mind’s ‘strange enchantment’, and Coleridge’s figurative conjurings are the worst: he is an abusively metaphysical poet...<sup>362</sup>

Having also attempted to change her into a ‘small Cheshire cheese,’ a ‘bowling ball’, however, proves beyond him and the moon declares

...now heaven be praised in contempt of the loon  
I am I myself I, the jolly full moon.(51-2)

As Lucy Newlyn shows, and Perry’s example above demonstrates, a process of dialogic exchange by way of mutual allusion to each other’s poems had been an established practice of the two poets. The process of statement and counter statement continues in the exchange between them, set up by Wordsworth’s publication of the 1815 Preface and Coleridge’s reply in *Biographia Literaria*.<sup>363</sup>

I would hazard that initially, at least, Coleridge’s disgruntled outrage at Wordsworth’s apparent ingratitude or failure to acknowledge Coleridge’s own contribution to Shakespeare criticism, as well as his response to the reviewers, rather than the disparity between their definitions of imagination and fancy and the controversy over poetic diction, is what compelled Coleridge to respond to Wordsworth. The importance of Shakespeare to their aesthetic project, and of *A*

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<sup>362</sup> Perry, (1999), 144-46.

<sup>363</sup> See Newlyn, (1996), for a persuasive account of the ways in which their poetry often operates as interactive argument, and provides a revisionary impetus, especially from Coleridge to Wordsworth.

*Midsummer Night's Dream* in particular, would have to be alluded to. The relationship of that to *The Prelude*, and of that poem's account of the growth of Wordsworth's mind, or his *poetic character* up to his own meeting with Coleridge and the writing of *Lyrical Ballads* is a major connecting link between the two. Wordsworth's comments in the 1815 Preface that 'invention, - by which characters are composed out of materials supplied by observation; whether of the Poet's own heart and mind, or of external life and nature', rather than any supplied by his own reading or another's, could be read as disingenuous. This debt to 'books' is one which Wordsworth was only later to acknowledge fully in *The Prelude* itself, and even that is at first rather apologetically made to Coleridge, as he prefers to give Nature the major influential palms in the early books.<sup>364</sup> But his earlier poem 'Personal Talk' had at least acknowledged the debt in 1807.

Trying to 'transmogrify' a familiar 'permanent object' such as a well known play or character, however, has its difficulties, and if the might of the original or primary imagination, proves beyond the power of the poet to translate then, as Coleridge writes of the secondary imagination, he will struggle:

The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former...it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate, or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.

I do think, however, that Coleridge 'struggles to idealise and to unify' *two* underlying primary models in this re-creation; those being Sternean wit or the digressive humour of Tristram, and a Shakespearean narrative model, with his own

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<sup>364</sup> See especially *The Prelude* 1805, V 630-37. This acknowledgement of 'what I owed to books in early life' (631) follows Wordsworth's description of the power of printed words, especially of 'glittering verse,' to create a world of their own in the 'mansion' of the mind, 'their proper home.'(625)

‘literary’ biography. But there are many structural and thematic parallels with Shakespeare’s play which we can discern.

The self-reflexive character of the play forms a critique of its own art: in Theseus’s metaphysical speech on the imagination; Bottom’s dramatic hyperbole and running through the different styles he might employ; and in the lovers’ resort to poetic cliché in act I. The final scene’s critique of a particular aesthetic production, with the audience pointing out its defects; and a comic dramatisation of the very ‘powers of production and of life’ in the imagination or desire - imagination and fancy- comically figured in Oberon, Titania, and the spirits of Nature and the mind, are only some of the connecting elements. As for the all too human and yet, obviously ambitious actor Bottom, Coleridge’s book, like Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, makes the ‘character of the poet’ a feature of his protean capacities, his occupation or ‘trade,’ rather than something totally ‘personal.’

As Coleridge earlier asserts, in a moment of pure Shandyism, which echoes his own complaint of Wordsworth’s resorting to ‘truisms’ in *The Recluse*,<sup>365</sup> his own vanity and egotism may have been the occasion for wanting to *prove* the existence of two different faculties in the first place, or at least assuming that he had been the ‘first of my countrymen’ to make the distinction. He himself suggests that this desire has been something of an ambition which might lead to disillusion. ‘It has already been hinted that metaphysics and psychology have long been my hobby-horse.’<sup>366</sup> The Shandean reference to the ‘hobby-horse’, however, may indicate that

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<sup>365</sup> See Coleridge’s letter to Lady Beaumont of April 1815. *CL* IV 564. Coleridge suggests that in *The Excursion* Wordsworth, having ‘*himself* convinced *himself*’ of truths, presumably of religion, which others ‘have either taken for granted from their infancy, or at least adopted in early life, he has attached all their own depth and weight to doctrines and words, which come almost as truisms or commonplaces to others.’ I will be looking at the ways in which imagination and fancy are used by Coleridge in their common-place contexts later in this chapter.

<sup>366</sup> *BL* I 204.

we should expect to have to engage with a narrative style which, though digressive, has more than a hint of method in its madness. An allusion such as this indicates Coleridge's consciousness of the implications of Sterne's Shakespearean wit. 'Hints' imply acknowledgement of that which is not said explicitly and openly, and constitutes in part the equivocal nature of the joke or pun. The hobbyhorses of *Tristram Shandy*'s characters, Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy, are known only to the narrator as either the insubstantial shadowy things they are, not much good for actually supporting a real and substantial body in Walter Shandy's case, and all too literally taken up as a kind of harmless obsession in Uncle Toby's. It is worth noting that Coleridge's characterisation of one of Schelling's theories, and the hypopoetic or fanciful nature of the logic which supports it, is as just such a hobbyhorse:

This is, or perhaps was, a hobbyhorse of Schelling's –  
this solar Origin of Oxygen. But Schelling's logic is so  
exquisite! Oxygen is of Solar Birth. Nay, it is extricated  
from a 1000 bodies on and in the earth. Yes! And that  
proves that those bodies have all been in the Sun, &  
thence exploded!<sup>367</sup>

Coleridge, however, like Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Joyce, is the fully conscious author of this narrative and knows exactly where this particular hobbyhorse is going to take him. As in his critique of the Shakespearean genius in volume II, the author is the god like being who stands behind his creation, fully conscious of the words he uses, the plots he manipulates, and the characters he employs. In using a narrative structure and a style borrowed from elsewhere he has to control the direction of two conflicting yet consciously controlled methods. The first is the Shandean digressive style, which figures the 'streamy nature of association' operating, not

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<sup>367</sup> Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 12. *Marginalia*. IV 387-8.



unconsciously, but, as Humphrey House suggests, driven by a leading idea or emotion (which in Coleridge's case is usually connected with the consciousness of an other, a thou rather than an I), and which directs the self to something outside itself, a something other than one's 'own' ideas.<sup>368</sup> The constant allusions to the writings of others could be read as a kind of anti-self-consciousness which functions in a mode closer to Keats's concept of Shakespearean negative capability than Wordsworthian self-sufficiency. Coleridge, unlike the assertive and demanding Schelling, merely informs the reader that he does not expect him 'to keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present.'<sup>369</sup> Coleridge's aesthetic also requires that each part be considered as part of a unified whole.

The second model is the Shakespearean plot, which is controlled not by the digressive spirit, Sterne's comic critique of enlightenment associationism, but by something pre-ordained; in a form which has already played out the drama of imagination and its relationship to the unconscious, the reason and the will. The great problem is how the original drama was interpreted. What errors of reading may have crept into that? The hermeneutics of reading itself, though, becomes a problematic theme of the plot itself in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Tristram Shandy* and *Biographia Literaria*<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Humphry House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures; 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953).46-47. House notes that the whole train of association in an extract from Coleridge's notebooks on an evening at Gallow Hill remembered in 1810 'is the affection for Sara, and the strong emotion accompanying it.' See also *BL* I 127 where Coleridge makes the necessity of the will, or what he calls the individual I, determining the connections, arbitrary or not, made by the mind in the act of association.

<sup>369</sup> *BL* I 234.

<sup>370</sup> See Kathleen Wheeler for a detailed commentary on what she argues is Coleridge's theory of hermeneutics, and in which she takes the reading process as subject matter of the book. Kathleen M. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). I would not disagree on the latter point, but I feel that concentrating on the metaphors, for example, of 'the small water insect,' she is not attentive enough to the difference between this use of fancy as illustration, and the more abstracted version of the imagination which produces the 'idea' of the active and passive powers of imagination, which can either use fancy or less 'particular' words to make the reader create images in her own mind for herself. Metaphor is in fact

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the unconscious dream of Bottom the weaver is part of the consciously made drama of Shakespeare the poet. Bottom's dream is Shakespeare's play, but Shakespeare's play is not Bottom's dream. His dream, only vaguely remembered and comically made the material inspiration, the fanciful stuff of a future ballad he will get his friend to write, could he only, like the dreamer of *Kubla Khan*, recall it all, is his own and not his own, he has slipped into it. The imagination however, this hobbyhorse, is kept under the control of the conscious maker or author's judgement whose materials are the products of his own reading as well as his experience.<sup>371</sup> However, it would require a rustic poet who is better qualified than Bottom to do that or something more than rustic language to convey it all.

In her study of Shakespeare's astonishingly versatile and effective use of renaissance rhetoric Sister Miriam Joseph notes that the figure of hypallage was named the changeling by Puttenham.

In hypallage, the changeling as Puttenham named it, the application of words is perverted and sometimes made absurd. Waking from the effects of the magic flower juice, the bewildered Bottom tries to recall his most rare vision.

The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen,  
man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue  
conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was.  
(MND 4.1. 215)

By the use of hypallage in this instance Shakespeare achieves the sense of grotesque wonder suited to the

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only one form of translation, either approach could be used, but the metaphor of the insect translates the idea as a picture, just as the 'idea' of activity and passivity in one power provides the 'law' of its movement or change of state. See her conclusion for a summary of Wheeler's argument. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria*. 154 -157.

<sup>371</sup> Jerome Christensen's post-structuralist reading traces this theme in Coleridge's writing from his early interest in Hartleyan associationism to the 'Method' of *The Friend*. Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

situation without incurring the risk of mockery of scripture (1 Cor.219) which might otherwise have resulted . Bottom seems to be addicted to this misplacing of words whether he speaks as Pyramus or himself.

I see a voice. Now I will to the chink,  
To spy an I can hear my Thisbe's face. (5.1. 194)<sup>372</sup>

Misunderstanding or puzzling over the relationship between that text and his dream, he has the uncanny feeling or sensation that there is somewhere a connection between his dream and St Paul's cryptic saying. As I suggested in chapter six, Wordsworth is familiar with Puttenham and quotes him in *Michael*, so there is scope to believe that Coleridge and he were familiar with this rhetorical figure and Puttenham's distinctive name for it too, as Shakespeare obviously was. As Coleridge writes in *Biographia* of the reader who is in a state like the person who makes a bull, Bottom 'gets the sensation but not the sense' of the dream, and of Paul's words.

In the letter above, when Coleridge refers to Wordsworth having convinced himself of the truths of Christian doctrine by his own 'experiences, feelings, and reason,' he is describing the kind of process which Bottom will have to undergo before he can convince himself of the truths of the doctrines of Paul. Coleridge's example of a Bull in *Biographia* fits Bully Bottom's situation well, and he is the only advocate in the play for a reconciliation of reason and love, rather than discord. But he has been given an experience in his dream by the spirits of the mind, which allows him to understand that there is more to love than reason, and that his dream might even be a route to the realisation that he is an 'airy spirit' that simply develops, and changes, in a growing, and changing, gross body.

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<sup>372</sup> Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature. No. 165. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947). 55.

I was a fine child, but they changed me.<sup>373</sup>

This is a rather wistful, but mysterious way of stating: ‘I am a changeling.’ The bull is made because the image of the child – the physical child – is taken as the same for both I and me. Hence a *physical* child has been changed. But the I as Coleridge says, is the I of ‘personal identity, Ego contemplans,’ the person I am now, while ‘me’ in this case is ‘the visual image or object [of the child] by which the mind represents to itself its past condition in the form in which it imagined itself previously to have existed—Ego contemplatus.’ If you are still following Coleridge, then he is by a very pedantic route, taking us to a philosophically expressed definition of a changeling. But he is doing it comically, by way of an ‘Irish Bull.’ In its relation to the play and to Wordsworth’s poetry, this is the stolen royal child which Titania adopts, and Oberon desires. If they are the spirits of Nature, which are also the spirits of the mind, then the changeling is like Wordsworth’s child in the Immortality Ode, who has had a spiritual home elsewhere but has been adopted by Nature:

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,

And no unworthy aim

The homely Nurse doth all she can  
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man

Forget the glories he hath known,  
And that imperial Palace whence he came. (79-84)

Wordsworth turns to the doctrine of pre-existence as, ‘having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising him to make for [his] purpose the best use of it as [he] could

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<sup>373</sup> BL I 72.

as a poet' and places the child of the *Ode* in some palatial home in a paradise which he yet 'sees' in his earliest experiences of nature.<sup>374</sup>

The 'sensations' that Wordsworth values above the certainties of dogma or sense are related to the 'feeling of life endless' rather than the certainties of immortality, and are therefore matters of faith rather than belief. In the same note to the poem Wordsworth explains his earliest sense of his 'indomitable spirit,' and inability to conceive of himself dying, as supporting his belief that he would be 'translated' like Enoch and Elijah, bodily 'to heaven.' Similarly, at the opposite extreme, he could not think of 'external things as having external existence,' but as 'inherent in [his] own immaterial nature.' This resulted in him having to 'grasp at a wall or a tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.'

Translation, as a recurring concept in Wordsworth's aesthetic and religious discourse, comes to represent the process whereby body and soul, the letter and the spirit can be confused, and result in error. In *Biographia* as Coleridge translates Schelling, making his text the literalised metaphor of 'translation,' so Bottom is translated into the literal metaphor of an ass, which is on a spiritual level, the figure of Christian, foolish love, and his transformation stages the fairies' transport or carrying away of the spirit from its proper but temporary home in the body, the seal which guarantees its authenticity.

I use this metaphor here to connect this trope with Hamlet's use of his dead father's seal to seal the forged letter he exchanges, 'the changeling never known.' (V ii 53) He makes this substitution in order to validate a lie, and ensure the murder of two innocent friends. Coleridge's notice of Horatio's question, 'How was this sealed?' in his *Treatise on Method* links the seal with the proper functioning of the word in truth

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<sup>374</sup> See the Fenwick Note to the poem, reprinted in *LB*, Butler and Green, 428-29.

and fidelity, and that can only be a function of the lawful use of habeas corpus. The evidence must be accompanied by the body itself, the rightful person must use the seal in order that the 'person' may vicariously speak. When only a changeling spirit speaks we are talking of shadows not substance. Previously to this, the question of the validity of 'the letter' has been made problematic, when the original seal itself was broken to discover truth falsified in order to promote murder.

Jerome Christensen sees in Coleridge's 'letter from a friend' in chapter XIII a literary escape clause in the man of letters, but Coleridge's friend is not merely a man of letters.<sup>375</sup> He is a text indeed, but he is also a representation of the sensuous imagination, who feels his way with his nose to the ground, and will not be duped into substituting a hobbyhorse, for the real thing. He shivers, hears, is palpably capable of responding to pain and pleasure. He translates the missing chapter according to the missing middle term which Coleridge tells us is both active and passive, the feelings, which are left out of Kant and Schelling's critical and dynamic philosophies.

The comical as well as the serious chanciness of equivocal words is illustrated in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Puck's mistaking one Athenian, Lysander, for Demetrius, simply by taking the outward form of his dress for the man, substituting the letter for the spirit. It does though, make for that comic confusion which Coleridge makes the matter of his own biography. In going beyond the spirit of Kant, taking the letter instead of the spirit perhaps in a religious sense, Schelling is heading for pantheism. The Wordsworth/Coleridge translation is about to give the spirit a local habitation outside its proper dwelling.

Sterne's digressive style, blank pages and punning jokes (Shandy's, to be exact) is laughable because the author knows that what is not written will be filled in

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<sup>375</sup> Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language*. 174.

by the reader's wayward imagination, and that what is written equivocally may be interpreted two ways. The comedy, the laugh, comes when we recognise the double entendre. The ludicrous, however, may be the route to something, the whole truth perhaps, which cannot be said openly without fear of disapprobation. Equally, the equivocation in words themselves not intended to be equivocal by the author, may be, as in the case of Oberon's mismanagement of words, the cause of a complete misunderstanding. Coleridge was fully aware of this and makes it a constant theme of *Biographia* itself, particularly with relation to how the original preface to *Lyrical Ballads* was to be understood, and how an unclear or perhaps even an ironic tone can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.<sup>376</sup> I am arguing, therefore, that the metaphysical 'hobby-horse' Coleridge rides is a very knowing one. Had he not chosen to suggest the Shandean implications by describing it as such, we might be less sure of the outcome. The outcome for the reader in *Tristram Shandy* is comic. Tristram tells his readers that although he had earlier said he was confident that the projected 'memoirs of his uncle Toby's courtship of the Widow Wadman' would be one of

the most compleat systems, both of the elementary and  
practical part of love and love-making, that ever was  
addressed to the world—are you to imagine from thence  
that I shall set out with a description of *what love is?*  
whether part God and part Devil, as *Plotinus* will have  
it—

Tristram then goes on to describe several obscure systems which he will *not* be using, from the mathematical to the medical; disquisitions of which his father 'had laid in a great stock,' and that he is not obliged to set out with a definition of what love is,

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<sup>376</sup> See Coleridge's critique of Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* in volume II, especially that part related to the 'best philosopher' in the poem and *apparently* ridiculed by Coleridge in his questioning of its assertions, that, as in all paradoxes, 'you must understand the words contrary to their common import, in order to arrive at any *sense*; and *according* to their common import if you are to receive any feeling of *sublimity* or *admiration*.' (BL II 141).

'Twill come out by itself by and bye...When I can get  
on no further,—and find myself entangled on all sides  
of this mystic labyrinth,—my Opinion will then come  
in, in course,—and lead me out.

Asked next, in order to 'conceive' the 'concupiscible' widow Wadman right, to call  
for pen and ink, and 'paint her to your own mind as like your mistress as you can—  
as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you— 'tis all one to me—please but  
your own fancy in it', the reader is presented with a blank page and the comment that  
the book will have one page, at least, 'which **Malice** will not blacken, and which  
**Ignorance** cannot misrepresent.'<sup>377</sup>

## 2. The Heart and the Head: Nehemiah and Bottom

Coleridge's hobby-horse is, or was, always intimately connected with his  
search for a system which could accommodate something other than mind, other than  
*mere* reflection. In his search for a system which answered the demands of morality,  
ethics, and responsibility above all for one's own actions, the free will had to be  
paramount; any system he adopted had to be inclusive of all these. The body, Lear's  
'thing itself' though spoken of in madness, must also be accommodated. It is this  
desire for completeness which makes Coleridge's search for an aesthetic, as well as  
for a religion and a political orientation, in which he could 'find himself,' one which  
would have to be what he considered essentially rather than nominally Christian, and  
was to be eventually Trinitarian rather than Unitarian or dualistic. Sterne, let us not  
forget, was at least a Christian minister, and Shakespeare's relationship with religion  
has of late received more attention than in the past. Closer attention is being paid to  
the religious as well as the political basis of the transformational aesthetic, which

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<sup>377</sup> *Tristram Shandy*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), 373-377.



connects his own hybrid tragic-comic dramatic form, especially in the pastoral mode, linking high and low characters as well as styles, with the radical Pauline doctrines of the New Testament. Wordsworth and Coleridge's radical aesthetic has much in common with this. As Deborah E. Shuger comments:

Radical texts do not invariably deal with social inequities rather than with the motions of private interiority...Even tinkers have souls (and pens) as well as bodies; if anything, the 'radicalism' of *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Grace Abounding* (as well as the Gospels and *Lyrical Ballads*) inheres in their claim that the inner lives of common labourers have both a literary and spiritual grandeur.<sup>378</sup>

To return then to the comic possibilities of the hobby-horse and its uses, in defining imaginative creativity that is, we must consider Coleridge's own characterisation of his particular hobby-horse. The fact that this follows the admission that 'even before my fifteenth year, I had bewildered myself in metaphysics, and in theological controversy,' and that having discovered the sonnets of Bowles and an amiable family, he none-the-less relapsed into the same 'mental disease [of] delving into the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths...without awakening the feelings of the heart,' ought to put us on the alert for some sort of later recognition in the narrative of the unreliability, or mistaken optimism of his attempt to find answers purely in the dynamic or critical philosophy. One meaning of hobby-horse during Sterne's period was 'a loose woman'<sup>379</sup>, however, and it is as just such a hobby-horse that widow Wadman in her seduction of Uncle Toby can be parodically

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<sup>378</sup> Deborah K. Schuger. 'Subversive Fathers and Suffering Subjects: Shakespeare and Christianity.' *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688*. Ed. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 46-69. 61.

<sup>379</sup> 'a foolish fellow, jester, buffoon' (*def* 3a); 'A lustful person; a loose woman, prostitute' (*def* 3b); 'a favourite pursuit or pastime' (*def* 6). 'hobby-horse.' *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2nd ed. Durham University Library. 14 Jan. 2009. <<http://dictionary.oed.com.exphost.dur.ac.uk>>.

compared to Venus and Adonis, or Titania and Bottom. The oscillating between comedy and pathos, which is an almost constant factor in *Biographia*, is hard to reconcile with the theory that in the course of writing *Biographia* Coleridge did *not* envisage that he would not be able to complete what he set out to do without returning to the guiding light of keeping the heart alive in the head, which he found in the writings of simple mystics like Boehme, and more importantly in the Gospels. It seems to me that we are prepared for this from the beginning.

But to have a hobby-horse and to be vain of it,  
are so commonly found together, that they pass almost  
for the same. I trust therefore, that there will be more  
good humour than contempt, in the smile with which  
the reader chastises my self complacency, if I confess  
myself uncertain, whether the satisfaction of a truth new  
to myself may not have been rendered more poignant by  
the conceit, that it would be equally so to the public. Yet  
even in this attempt I am aware, that I shall be obliged to  
draw more largely on the reader's attention, than so  
immethodical a miscellany can authorize.<sup>380</sup>

Coleridge's own natural facility for comic prose and poetic parody is exemplified in the early parodies referred to in chapters one and two; the former more particularly in the scene with the Dane, the satirised comic type of the egotistical idealist (who Coleridge presents in chapter XII as the Schellingian metaphysical philosopher), on board the ship which is taking him and the Wordsworths to Germany, published in Volume II as Satyrane's Letters.<sup>381</sup>

I contributed three sonnets, the first of which had for its  
object to excite a good natured Laugh at the spirit of  
doleful egotism, and at the recurrence of favourite

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<sup>380</sup> BL I 85.

<sup>381</sup> BL II 166-170.

phrases, with the double effect of being at once trite and  
licentious. (*BL* I 169 )

His pseudonym then was Nehemiah Higginbottom, builder of the new  
Jerusalem in poetry perhaps, but certainly a parodist of the excessive sentimentalism  
which Coleridge was all too aware that Sterne unwittingly helped to introduce.<sup>382</sup> The  
poems are reprinted for 'biographical purposes and not for their poetic merits' ( *BL* I:  
169 ); biographical purposes which also emphasise the comic licentiousness allowed  
to the parodist and reminding Wordsworth, no doubt, of the point from which they  
originally set out on the road to *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge also points us towards a  
comic spirit or buffoon who is also an iconoclast in the guise of an enthusiast. The  
satyrane type whom Shakespeare recasts into the figure of Bottom is the mechanical  
or tradesman who wants to play all the parts, and knows all the styles and who, in his  
own pastoral transformation of Ovidian tales of love into a specifically English  
idiom, is the lucky mortal who attracts Venus by his asinine beauty, and yet chastely  
rebuffs her. The passion of Venus and Adonis is a one way love story which in  
*Biographia* becomes the occasion for an explication of Fancy as it is used in  
Shakespeare's poetry,<sup>383</sup> and of blind, erotic desire in the poem and the play.

Shakespeare's comic transformation or translation of mythical poetry into  
dramatic tale is balanced, overarched by, the lyrically beautiful; the measured music  
of Shakespeare's own sensuous imagination. The descent into the comic and bathetic  
is the descent to the ground, to Bottom's level, but the ascent from that ground is  
made not by way of fanciful flights but of imagination grounded in reason, and the  
clear light of seeing the common things of an everyday English landscape as simply

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<sup>382</sup>Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*. 357. 'All the evil achieved by Hobbes and the whole school of materialists will appear inconsiderable if it be compared to the mischief effected and occasioned by the sentimental philosophy of Sterne, and his numerous imitators.... it was an amiable weakness.'

<sup>383</sup> See *BL* II 19-26 for Coleridge on Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. See also chapter one above, 42 on 'Fire, Famine and Slaughter.'

and as beautifully diverse as they are. Clothed in Glory they may be, but only in the dream state is Bottom truly able to converse with things that really are, the spirits of and in Nature.

The Bottom 'translation' is elucidated by Jan Kott, and made the symbol of all which is licentious and transgressive in carnival.<sup>384</sup> He elucidates this together with much of the neo-platonic philosophy which underpins *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and is figured in the ass, which at one level represents the sheer physicality and eroticism of the body, at another the wise-foolishness of St. Paul; the humanity, as well as the divinity of Christ and man. Kott's reading relies on Bakhtin's ludic vision and the 'dialogic imagination' to support his thesis that Bottom's translation can be read in both the hermetic and the burlesque tradition, as mystery or carnival, but it is the burlesque vision which he supports. But it is reason in Bottom, which appears to be paramount, not imagination. Reason, oddly is the kind of literalness which saves Bottom from being entirely seduced by his own fantasies – yet it is through the blind fancy of his dream that he or we come to understand, almost, what is divine in himself, his reason.

Before plunging headlong into his translation of Schelling, Shandy-like, Coleridge forces the reader's attention to stray from the studied piety of the prose below, into making connections. Here the double-entendre (and please pardon the oxymoron) is pure Shandy; pure Shakespeare; pure mix, and, pace Perry, pure muddle. The comic irony here must surely be, not simply at the expense of Schelling's theory, but to suggest another system which does clothe its ideas in images, and is as much a 'multeity in unity' as any Gothic Cathedral. But it is a comic

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<sup>384</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1967); Jan Kott, *The Bottom Translation: Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987).

irony, a humorist's joke, and we hear Coleridge's distinctive voice here, not Schelling's arrogance.

The fairest part of the most beautiful body will appear deformed and monstrous, if dissevered from its place in the organic whole. Nay, on delicate subjects, where a seemingly trifling difference of more or less may constitute a difference in kind, even a faithful display of the main and supporting ideas, if yet they are separated from the forms by which they are clothed and modified, may perchance present a skeleton indeed; but a skeleton to alarm and deter. Though I might find numerous precedents, I shall not desire the reader to strip his mind of all prejudice, or keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present.<sup>385</sup>

The mind tends to make pictures of what it reads as abstract prose, and the fancy clothes, (in part II of *Biographia* it is poetry's drapery) what the form only outlines. What I see in the mind's eye is the fairest part of the body - the head or face-detached from its place in the organic whole and placed on some other body, or a beast's head placed on a human's, a monster ensuing. The other alternatives are legion. The problem is, that without any definite imagery which keeps the mind too attentive to that to be conscious of the 'baser passions', the fancy will wander. The sexual connotations are hinted at in the suggestions that more or less may constitute a difference in kind, rather than a difference of degree. But the difference in kind is that between a human and a beast, at least at the level of sight. My imagination translates, my fancy transforms, these 'ideas'.

The links with Coleridge's earlier letter to Cottle on the unity of *Lyrical Ballads* consisting of poems of the same 'kind' suggest that Coleridge may have

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<sup>385</sup> BL II 234.

changed his mind. Perhaps his poetry is of a different kind, that of fancy rather than imagination, and he has therefore, missed out on his vocation by deciding that the greater poet, Wordsworth, was the ‘true giant,’ with the higher power of imagination being his ‘kind’ of poetry. What should unite the two kinds, however, is, something which eventually has to reconcile all opposites, and that may be love, though humorously staged.

Humour in Sterne brings the hobbyhorse into a tri-part relationship, that between Mr and Mrs Shandy and the wisdom of the fool, Uncle Toby, with the Widow Wadman entering as a rather dubiously interested seductress. Like Bottom, Toby is bemused but prepared to take the widow at face value. It is his ‘good heart,’ like Bottom’s, despite his foolishness, which makes him the most memorable character in the book

Coleridge’s delineation of the role of the humour is in its capacity to literally bring us down to earth, and to make us aware of the points where we are all equal, our common human nature or heart. He sees that as being Wordsworth’s intention in *Lyrical Ballads*, and was therefore disappointed that *The Excursion* had done no more than reiterate these common truths, but he uses the by now familiar metaphor that those truths are merely the ‘foundation’ laid, on which a greater and more philosophical vision was to be later constructed:

How can common [trut]hs be made permanently  
interesting but by being *bottomed* in our common  
human nature.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> See Coleridge’s letter to Wordsworth on ‘The Excursion,’ and the relationship of that to *The Recluse* and ‘commonplace truths.’ ‘Now this I supposed to have been in your two Volumes of Poems, as far as was desirable or p[ossible] without an insight into the whole Truth— How can common [trut]hs be made permanently interesting but by being *bottomed* in our common human nature.’ CL IV 576.

As Seamus Perry notes in defining the ‘bull,’ which Coleridge, just at the point when the obtuse friend of the letter in chapter XIII, Bully Bottom-like in his incomprehension, yet most solicitous in his good wishes and good heartedness, re-introduces from chapter IV where it was used to describe the perplexity of readers at not quite knowing where they stood with Wordsworth’s poems. Quoting from Coleridge’s notebooks, Perry writes:

bulls occur ‘where the logic of the mere understanding is allowed to bring the entia of the supersensual world down to its Procrustes Bed’. (*Notebooks*, IV: 4679), he is practically recasting his definition of the symbol, ‘which incorporates the Reason in Images of the Sense’<sup>387</sup>

Perry’s ‘comic realism’ is perhaps the characteristic function of Bully Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. When the fancy-struck Titania tells him he is an angel, as wise as he is beautiful, he politely declines the flattering adulation:

Methinks mistress you should have little reason for that.  
And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little  
company together nowadays. The more the pity that  
some honest neighbours will not make them friends.<sup>388</sup>

This comic realism is of the same order as that which Coleridge presents in the character of the friend. Finding oneself standing on one’s head, as he describes his reaction to the chapter on imagination, is akin to finding imagination placed above reason, to find oneself confronted with a dream philosophy that one cannot quite understand. But who is the friend addressing? Is it Coleridge, Schelling or

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<sup>387</sup> Perry, (Cambridge, 1999), 275.

<sup>388</sup> *MND* III i 131-4.

Wordsworth?<sup>389</sup> The missing chapter has been, not *The Prelude*, which Coleridge had responded to in the lines quoted by the friend, but with a few of the words altered:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ An orphic tale indeed,  
A tale *obscure* of high and passionate thoughts  
To a strange music chanted!

Something which combines both 'substances thinned away into shadows', and 'shadows deepened into substances' : Fancy and Imagination in the form of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *The Prelude*, or *Biographia Literaria*, or even *Lyrical Ballads*.

The general consensus is that there is no unity in *Biographia Literaria* or that it is not uniformly sustained. The principle which Coleridge advocates in his *Treatise on Method* and which he chooses to exemplify in Theseus' speech on imagination<sup>390</sup>, is the adoption of a leading idea or initiative. Coleridge has done exactly that and adopted a leading idea which unifies the two volumes and which can be identified on virtually every page. The title page is the first example of it, presenting itself in both Latin and English. The concise two words of the learned man's Latin, however, are mistranslated to link the book with Tristram Shandy's digressive, and fanciful, comic prose. The leading idea is change. Its ramifications are seen in the multiple references to and uses of translation and transformation. The metaphor of the 'changeling' verse is brought into play in a discussion of Wordsworth's poetic style

it is the prerogative of poetic genius to distinguish by  
parental instinct its proper offspring from the

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<sup>389</sup> For the relationship of Schelling's philosophy to Wordsworth's poetry see E. D. Hirsch, *Wordsworth and Schelling: A Typological Study of Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). Hirsch finds many parallels in *The Prelude* with Schelling's transcendental philosophy of nature.

<sup>390</sup> See chapter one above.



changelings which the gnomes of vanity or the fairies of  
fashion may have laid in its cradle or called by its name.

This suggests that substitution has been made, for what Coleridge sees as the genuinely visionary poetry which is the soul of Wordsworth's poetic genius.<sup>391</sup> This may refer to Wordsworth and Coleridge's conscious decision to adopt the fashionable ballad form, in a spirit of that vanity which Coleridge accuses himself of above, in order simply to make money, and which Wordsworth, to some extent buoyed up by partial success, and almost obsessed with once his transformational method had become a habit, continued to use or resort to, in order to support his failing sense of a personal vision. As Coleridge says of his own poem *Christabel* when he writes about accusations of plagiarism, and the habits of source hunters in poetry, (like myself, perhaps) there are 'fountains' as well as 'tanks.'<sup>392</sup> Though he seems to refer to himself here, he may well be thinking of Wordsworth too, as a poet who lost his original way by drinking from too many tanks. We would not see this as Wordsworth's failure. But the failure to produce *The Recluse* which Wordsworth himself thought of as his great work, like Coleridge's 'future work,' the grand magnum opus, was a burden, and a dream which always remained beyond him.<sup>393</sup>

The Wordsworth Coleridge responded to as the arrival of 'an original poetic genius above the literary horizon' was the Wordsworth of the manuscript poem which

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<sup>391</sup> BL II 82-83. Coleridge denies that 'observation' is a paramount factor in poetry, especially in the field of character creation. In relation to Wordsworth's supposedly advocating seeking about the countryside 'for 'angry or jealous people in order to copy their words,' he argues that meditation is primary, and imagination confers on those characters observed, the 'forms' of the 'all in each of human nature.' Christensen reads Coleridge as making this claim throughout *Biographia*. Christensen, (1977).

<sup>392</sup> The Preface to 'Christabel.' 'For there is amongst us a set of critics, who seem to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things as fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would therefore charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank.' In *The Prelude* Wordsworth refers to Coleridge's assumption that 'Salisbury Plain' had caught from the 'vulgar forms of present things, /... a tone/An image and a character by books/Not hitherto reflected.' (1805) XII, 361-65.

<sup>393</sup> On Wordsworth's struggles with *The Recluse* and its relation to Coleridge, and the work which we do have already by Wordsworth, see Kenneth R. Johnston, *Wordsworth and the Recluse* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1984). Johnston sees the work which we do have as constituting the poem, although not in a single form.

was ‘Salisbury Plain.’<sup>394</sup> If transformation and translation took over Wordsworth for a time like a possession, it was difficult to find the hiding places of that power again. Translation therefore is the leading idea of *Biographia Literaria*. There is hardly a page in which translation it is not revealed in one form or another. From Coleridge’s early recollections of translating Milton and Shakespeare at school — ‘the hardest to bring up’ — in chapter I, to his wholesale translations of Schelling, each page contains some reference to translation or a translation itself, which plays change of heart, change of mind, and the subtle, but for Coleridge, devastating consequences of some of those changes against fidelity or faith in the consequences of faulty translation. This is staged by Coleridge, in *The Friend*, for example, where Martin Luther literalises the spirit of evil, Satan, as a devil. The consequence of changing Imagination’s indefinites in this way, for Fancy’s images, is that superstition and error enter into doctrine or are allowed to remain there. Coleridge makes the scene almost comic as he describes Luther’s desperate turn to the Catholic Vulgate version of the Bible, but the consequences are serious.<sup>395</sup> The serious and the comic are also combined in *Biographia*’s transformational aesthetic. What is most remarkable is just how Coleridge manages to sustain the balance between the comic and the serious which supports this hybrid form. The most difficult trick, however, is for the reader to distinguish handy from dandy.

What I find fascinating in this account of change and transformation is Coleridge’s studied expression of his philosophical and religious doubts. It seems to me to mirror perfectly the grotesque figure of Bottom, the would be poet whose asinine head appears to characterise the whole man, but whose heart, in every sense of

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<sup>394</sup> *BL* I 77.

<sup>395</sup> See ‘The Landing-Place, or Essays Interposed for Amusement, Retrospect, and Preparation: Essay II,’ reprinted from *The Friend* (1818), in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The Major Works*. Oxford World’s Classics. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 623-630.

the word, is the token of his humanity and spirit. Bottom, whose unfailing courtesy, love for his friends, foolish wisdom of love, and irrepressible determination to be and do all, to try all the parts like that Spinozean conatus or striving, is the mark of his abiding will to succeed and his almost inevitable susceptibility to error. Do we not see something here, if not of everyman, of Coleridge himself?

For a very long time indeed I could not reconcile personality with infinity; and my head was with Spinoza, though my whole heart remained with Paul and John. Yet there had dawned upon me even before I had met with the Critique of Pure Reason, a certain guiding light. If the mere intellect could make no certain discovery of a holy and intelligent first cause, it might yet supply a demonstration, that no legitimate argument could be drawn from the intellect against its truth. And what is this more than St Paul's assertion, that by wisdom (more properly translated by the powers of reasoning) no man ever arrived at the knowledge of God?

Already knowing the truth and having secured his guiding light, as it were, in chapter X, by the beginning of Chapter XII, having indeed entered the maze of metaphysical speculation in Germany, Coleridge has already highlighted the perils of translation itself and the possibility of error. Coleridge pointedly marks the years after Luther's death as the period when Germany itself 'was inundated with pedantic barbarisms' until the period in which it reached a similar flowering of literature and culture which Coleridge sees as mirroring the age of Dryden. What Coleridge seems to suggest here is that Germany did not have the literary heritage which England could fall back on. It is in the critique of *Bertram* in part two of *Biographia*, added because of a printer's blunder as to the number of pages needed, and in the comic

characterisation of the Hamlet like Dane in ‘Satyrane’s Letters’ that Coleridge makes his most scathing satirical attack on idealism which does not act on its own principles, in a demonstration of the theory which appears to have developed out of his reading of Shakespeare, his assumptions about character, and the mistaken reliance on ‘painting to... the fancy’, which he appears to criticise in Wordsworth’s *Excursion* in the earlier chapters.<sup>396</sup> In approaching Schelling’s transcendental philosophy, his ‘nature philosophy,’ the Coleridge who travels hopefully while his ‘mind was thus perplexed’ as he warns us in the clearest terms possible, is at the point of entering the ‘labyrinth’. And we enter with him. McFarland characterises the Coleridgean paradox of his inexplicable translations of Schelling using exactly the same trope:

I have no thread of Ariadne to lead us out of the  
labyrinth; we can do little but consider how very  
complex, how neurotic, and psychologically clouded  
Coleridge’s unorthodox practices were. It is also clear  
how very inadequate is the simple term ‘plagiarism’ to  
term them. In general, Coleridge presents us with the  
paradox of a burglar who seems more intent on setting  
off the alarm than on robbing the safe.<sup>397</sup>

Coleridge, however takes us to Shakespeare’s own transformation of the myth and alerts us to the implications of translation and its comic possibilities. The thread of Ariadne, the clue which led Bottom ‘out of this wood’ was to wake up and reclaim his wits. His five senses may, however, not explain what he experienced when he was asleep or when blind, doting fancy in the form of Titania usurped those wits and

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<sup>396</sup> See Perry, (2001), 192. “‘It is for the biographer, not the poet to give the *accidents* of individual life.’” (*CL* IV 572.), 192.

<sup>397</sup> McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*. 40.

showed him the 'invisible world' when 'the light of sense [went] out.'

### 3. Staging Translation in Shakespeare

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Shakespeare dramatises comically and cryptically the possibility of error which has crept into religious belief since the translation of the Bible and the reformation of belief instigated by the German Luther. In a scene which accuses the cozening Germans of theft and dissimulation, the host stands between a doctor of physic and a doctor of the soul, like some connecting middle or link which makes him the symbol of the body- the real presence. The Host's horses have been stolen by the cozening Germans. The host has lost his real horses and has been left with nothing. One of the meanings of translation, as listed by Patricia Parker was actually plagiarism. Originally the theft of a goat, the theft of the prize given at Greek poetry contests, which was due to another, in Montaigne and others it was occasionally characterised as horse theft. The horse, as in *Richard II* is intimately connected with identity and occupation. To steal a man's horse is therefore tantamount to stealing the propriety inherent in the social identity of the person. Property and propriety, as Coleridge is at pains to point out when discussing the de-synonymising of words when related to the destruction or defamation of an author's character is tantamount to theft of his livelihood.

The network of wordplay on translation, conveying, construing, and construction in *Merry Wives* links terms of language with terms of property, including theft and the carrying or transporting of words away from a proper sense. This intersection of language

and property, involve[es] translation as a form of  
conveyance in every sense...<sup>398</sup>

In the Preface of 1815, Wordsworth writes that the translator or engraver, one who makes sketches, must be passive and in a state of subjection to external objects.

Coleridge, taking Wordsworth at his words' worth does just that. He translates Schelling and sketches his own life in a passively subjective way, he translates all his other sources faithfully too, but he does it also in the Shakespearean manner, with a smile at the immethodically humorous implications of translation and transformation.

#### 4. 'Our Genuine Divines and Philosophers': The case for an English 'Genius'

Quoting from *Paradise Lost* at the beginning of chapter thirteen, Coleridge draws our attention to Milton, at a point in the narrative when he has already translated Schelling, has returned to his own distinctive voice, and, like Theseus in the play, is about to discourse on the definition of imagination. He gives this task to Milton, however, whose narrative of the fall of man, the story of Adam and Eve of Genesis, has already taken place.

.... both life, and sense,  
Fancy, and *understanding* whence the soul  
*Reason* receives, and REASON is her being.  
DISCURSIVE or INTUITIVE.  
Discourse is oftenest yours, the latter most is ours,  
Differing but in *degree*, in *kind* the same.  
Paradise Lost. Book V

He follows this with a cryptic note which refers to this change in meaning:

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<sup>398</sup> Patricia A. Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). 146.

\* “But for sundry notes on Shakespeare, etc, which have fallen in my way, I should have deemed it unnecessary to observe that discourse here, or elsewhere does not mean what we now call discoursing; but the discursion of the mind. Thus, philosophy has hitherto been discursive: while geometry is always and essentially intuitive.”<sup>399</sup>

Why would these ‘sundry’ Shakespeare notes make it necessary to point out the philosophical or precise meaning of the word? What he points out is that the word has changed, just as philosophy has changed. It is no longer discursive but, as Coleridge makes clear, it is often based on mere assertion and more often based on false reasoning or analogies with modern physics, as in the case of Schelling. Might it also be to foreground Milton’s use of *undiscriminated* Fancy here? Certainly the distinction between the reason and the understanding predates Kant. But Kant’s use of geometry and negative qualities to try to reason his way to God is logically brilliant, but for Coleridge mechanical and dead. But in using fancy rather than Theseus’ more general imagination, Milton makes poetry, which he equates with fancy, a vehicle for conveying or translating the truths of reason to the understanding. Milton’s fixities and definites in the persons of Adam and Eve, like Oberon and Titania, are not Wordsworth’s indefinite ‘powers’ or ‘Spirits.’ He also points out that Wordsworth’s use of discourse in ‘Discourse of the Wanderer’ in *The Excursion* is not that used by Shakespeare and Milton. Wordsworth uses it to mean the oration of the Wanderer.

It is worth noting Coleridge’s use of the words fancy and imagination in a variety of contexts in the narrative of *Biographia Literaria* to define their meaning. In chapter III, for instance, on ‘Mr. Southey’s works and character’, Coleridge’s effusive praise of fancy is fused with a recognition of Southey’s moral virtues. We can also

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<sup>399</sup> BL I 295.

discriminate between Coleridge's use of imagination and fancy in this same passage, as imagination is aligned with an indefinite 'future biographer' and fancy (as Coleridge defines it in chapter XIII) is associated with fixities and definite pictures, persons, or images:

I have in imagination transferred to the future  
biographer the duty of contrasting Southey's fixed and  
well earned fame...(BL I 63)

...from the full blaze of the 'Kehama' (a gallery of  
finished pictures in one splendid fancy piece, in which,  
notwithstanding, the moral grandeur rises gradually  
above the brilliance of the colouring and the boldness  
and novelty of the machinery)... (BL I 64)

Again, in Chapter I with reference to Pope:

Even when the subject was addressed to the fancy, or  
the intellect, as in the Rape of the Lock or the Essay on  
Man.(BL I 18)

Prior to that, in describing his own youthful development, it is to the fancy that he turns, not the Wordsworthian imagination. It is as against the 'preposterous pursuit' of metaphysical speculation that Coleridge contrasts his more natural tendencies or his own particular genius:

...still there was a long and blessed interval, during  
which my natural faculties were allowed to expand, and  
my original tendencies to develop themselves: my  
fancy, and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in  
forms and sounds.(BL I 17)

On elucidating the nature of dreams he refers to the 'blind fancy-'



-which would fair interpret to the mind the painful  
sensations of sleep; but neither lessen nor dim the deep  
sense of my moral and intellectual obligations.(*BL* I 11)

In this last example Coleridge's wit amusingly translates Bottom's seductive dream of Titania's infatuation for him as a consequence of some physical pain, which none-the-less is still recognisably something he should morally refuse! What it also suggests is that the imagination is not the only vehicle for conveying moral truth. Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's earlier valorisation of imagination as the moral whilst fancy is the seductive or amoral faculty is obviously questioned. Wordsworth once said that the first poem in the sequence of sonnets of 1803 was the only poem he wrote based on the fancy, and he turns away from it, determined that he should not be drawn in to 'the delicious stream.' Around this time he and Coleridge both seemed to have toyed with the idea that evil could be attributed to the 'streamy nature of association.' I don't pretend to understand fully what Coleridge meant by this, except to suggest that by slipping into that associative stream of thoughts desire slips out of the control of right reason and morality. Here though, after ten or so years Wordsworth is claiming fancy as a modifying power just as much as Milton seems to do. If this is the case then fancy is not to be dismissed as dealing with 'mere' fixity and definites as though it were a negative faculty but should be recognised as the counterpart spirit of imagination, and would give birth to a poetry which gives equal weight to individual distinctiveness and generic form.

In these few examples and many more throughout the book Coleridge deliberately draws attention to the common conversational or common sense uses of the words imagination and fancy, and the various contexts in which they might be used, often substituting one for the other. This is the contextual method which

Spinoza himself said that we should use to interpret the obscure or equivocal words used in Biblical texts, by always relating their varied meanings to the context in which they are used, and by distinguishing the historically situated cultural and imaginative use of language in which they were written from the truths of reason which they were meant to convey.<sup>400</sup> It is also a method which Schelling and the critical philosophers did not use, hence, as the editors of *Biographia* note, Coleridge's irritation at Schelling's 'symbolic logic and the awkward definitions' in one piece of marginalia:

"What do you mean? Give me an instance." The text  
had become too abstract.<sup>401</sup>

But could it possibly be said that it would be pedantry or plain pig-headedness to make so large an issue ( the production of the narrative excursion which is *Biographia Literaria* ) out of the necessity of distinguishing between the two? Certainly the decades of polemical criticism which has resulted from Coleridge's distinction would seem to imply that his attempt has not been an unmitigated success. I. A. Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination* is credited generally with being the best study of Coleridge's theory of imagination, but the distinction has produced interpretations as contentious as they are numerous.<sup>402</sup> J. R. DE J. Jackson summarises the differing positions in his 1969 essay ' "Fancy" Restored to Dignity'<sup>403</sup> before arguing that imagination and fancy are "two distinct and widely differing faculties." His conclusions are not based on *Biographia Literaria* alone, however, and he has to rely on introducing the reason and understanding from 'a note in Coleridge's hand on

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<sup>400</sup> See Christopher Norris, *Spinoza & the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*, The Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory. (Oxford; Cambridge, MA.: Basil Blackwell, 1991). 28-31. Norris cites Spinoza as one of the forebears of modern literary criticism, especially in his role as one of the first Biblical exegetes and precursor of the hermeneutical method of the higher criticism.

<sup>401</sup> Introduction, *BL* I cxxxi.

<sup>402</sup> I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1934).

<sup>403</sup> From chapter five of *Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism*. (Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1969). Reprinted in John Spencer Hill, ed., *The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1977). 136-164, 148.

the endpapers of a volume of Tennemann's '*Geschichte der Philosophie*.' Yet, as can be gleaned from Coleridge's citing of *Paradise Lost* in chapter X, Coleridge had already given his readers the hint that reason and understanding were not to be forgotten; that there were already sound systems in place which were based on Christian philosophy. In fact in chapter XII he clearly tells his readers 'I shall not desire the reader to strip his mind of all prejudices, or to keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present.' (BL I 234). The present he is talking about here is Schelling's system, which is the opposite of his own in *Biographia*. The choice of 'writing [his] metaphysical works, as *my life, & in my life*' had been made in 1803-4, and was to be 'intermixed with all the other events / or history of the mind and fortunes of S. T. Coleridge.'<sup>404</sup>

Barbara Hardy is another critic for whom the Fancy /Imagination distinction refuses to do its work in the practical department by putting 'labels' on entire plays or poems. Fearing that we cannot do this often enough to make a case for the distinction, she asks: 'Will we not find ourselves in a critical limbo where there is only evidence of an enormous versatile creative power which refuses to stand still long enough for us to fix either label.'<sup>405</sup>

If ever there was an example of Wordsworth's and Shakespeare's conception of one aspect of the imagination as infinite desire or hope it is in Coleridge's blithe assertions of future successes and achievements. At whatever stage Wordsworth wrote those famous lines apostrophising the imagination in *The Prelude*: 'With hope it is, hope that can never die!' it is certain that Coleridge would have remembered them.<sup>406</sup> Perhaps this is what Coleridge meant by presenting his theories in the form of his *own*

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<sup>404</sup> CN I 1515.

<sup>405</sup> Barbara Hardy. 'Distinction Without Difference: Coleridge's Fancy and Imagination.' *Essays in Criticism*. I (1951). Reprinted in Hill, (1977), 136-144. 144.

<sup>406</sup> *The Prelude* 1805, VI 540.

life. What we know from St Paul's epistle however, is that without charity, faith and hope are as nothing. The apostrophe to imagination as 'hope', appears, though, in the middle of the poet's epic journey towards Alfoxden wood. One might say it is like love, in a mist. Only at the end of his journey is love made the object and highest form of the imagination, and that is recognised in the clear light of the moon above the mist, but leading back to the track which he has followed, and issues from the place 'the real sea' where those imagined 'roaring' voices mingle.

We know also that there is a good deal of humour and comic irony which runs through *Biographia Literaria* which seems at odds with its high seriousness, yet Shakespeare's hybrid style could be the model for this. If the adoption of Schelling could be conceived as a deliberate ploy which figures translation and entrapment, as much as the letter from a friend performs the function of putting a highly amusing stop to Coleridge's metaphysics. perhaps like Lamb, we could say that Coleridge.

The Friend's letter breaks into Chapter XIII at the height of the 'transcendental philosopher's proud and self centred disquisition. 'Now the transcendental philosophy *demands*; first...' We should note that the tone here is assertive, coercive rather than persuasive. I would suggest that at this point we should refer back to the sonnets which Coleridge contributed to *The Morning Post* under the pseudonym of Nehemiah Higginbottom. To build anew the walls of Jerusalem and the temple was the tradesman Nehemiah's Biblical vocation; to ridicule the bombastic and hubristic poetic style of Shakespeare's contemporaries is one of Bottom's functions in the play, but he also refers us to the wisdom of the fool, which is that of St Paul in his letters to the Corinthians. Paul preaches the wisdom of love, and of faith and hope, but it is love above all which must be coveted.

Coleridge's ideal reader, Wordsworth, was the recipient of the whimsical sonnet which accompanied Coleridge's 'The Nightingale' for its inclusion in *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem can be read as a rationalised translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* without the intrusion of fancy.

The character he is about to assume, to whom he is about to be 'translated', seems to be a fool, an ass. Coleridge is about to take on Schelling word for word and, as Bottom becomes with his ass head a literalised metaphor, which works at more than one level, so Coleridge will translate himself in word, if not in spirit into Schelling. If any sanction can be found for Coleridge's translation of Schelling with only the minimum of acknowledgement it is because the logic of Schelling's *identitäts philosophie* demands it. If it is at the same time capable of being construed as pantheism, it is perhaps only to construe *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a pantheistic poetic credo. At the time of writing *Lyrical Ballads* and of the first two books of the 1798-99 *Prelude*, it would be safe to assume that if not pantheism, the one life doctrine, which both Wordsworth and Coleridge espoused at that time, was politically and poetically a radically Pauline approach, which moves toward a redemptive process based on the recognition of suffering and its corollary, joy. It is reached through imaginative identification with the suffering of those who are most marginalized in society, the abject, the dispossessed, the poor, the mad, through the medium of the transforming imagination of *another*, whether Shakespeare's, Wordsworth's or Coleridge's imagination, that the truths of reason are perceived.

## Chapter 8 ‘I desire you of more Acquaintance, Good Master Mustard Seed’: William Hazlitt’s First Acquaintance with Poets

When William Hazlitt comes to write of his first meeting with Wordsworth in Alfoxden in June 1798, his account is written with a wry knowingness, which borders on tongue in cheek comedy.<sup>407</sup> The description of Coleridge and himself delving into the manuscripts of *Lyrical Ballads* and his conflation of these with Coleridge’s later *Sibylline Leaves* is tinged with an air of mystery; almost a sense of secrecy and conspiracy which conveys a deliberate yet self-satisfied conviction of having been in on the ground floor of some grand and yet to be launched enterprise of no ordinary dimensions. Prior to describing this meeting Hazlitt refers to a curiously negative account of Wordsworth’s claim to originality in his poetry which centres on the originating idea of Wordsworth’s *Poems on the Naming of Places* having been, as Hazlitt suggested to him, in St Pierre’s *Paul and Virginia*.

He did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without a difference, in defence of his claim to originality. Any the slightest variation would be sufficient for this purpose in his mind, for whatever he added or omitted would inevitably be worth all that anyone else had done, and contain the marrow of the sentiment.<sup>408</sup>

Having been written after Coleridge’s *Biographia* and with the benefit of Coleridge’s comments on Wordsworth’s poetry, Hazlitt’s account of his meeting with the two poets gives further support to my argument that much of the poets’ inspiration came from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, because he seems to be using the same method of allusive transformation that I am suggesting the poets themselves used. I

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<sup>407</sup> *My First Acquaintance with Poets*, (Hazlitt, 2004). 63-83.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

might have referred to Hazlitt's account at an earlier stage of this thesis but given its late publication date of 1825, and since it is one of the only accounts of their earliest collaboration I am breaking the mainly chronological sequence here.

Hazlitt opens his narrative of this encounter, however, on a subdued and lyrical note tinged with regret, but which takes its cue from Theseus's speech on the imagination which 'bodies forth' the shapes of things, and drifts into a dream vision which echoes Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality' in its wistful sublimity:

In the outset of life (and particularly at this time I felt it so) our imagination has a body to it. We are in a state between sleeping and waking, and have indistinct but glorious glimpses of strange shapes, and there is always something to come better than what we see. As in our dreams the fullness of the blood gives warmth and reality to the coinage of the brain, and so in youth our ideas are clothed, and fed, and pampered with our good spirits; we breathe thick with thoughtless happiness, the weight of future years presses on the strong pulse of the heart, and we repose with undisturbed faith in truth and good. As we advance we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope. We are no longer wrapped in *lambs-wool* lulled in Elysium. As we taste the pleasures of life, their spirit evaporates, the sense palls; and nothing is left but the phantoms, the lifeless shadows of what *has been!*

What is more telling perhaps, is that the tone and allusive style of the rest of the account smacks of a comic irony steeped in a ludicrous theatricality of expression which Hazlitt seems to be aiming more towards a readership of fellow initiates than a more general one (Lamb perhaps, among others?). I would like to examine just how the Hazlitt who seems to have consistently castigated the person, if not the poetry of Wordsworth and the 'Lake School' for so many years, comes to a point where,

personal animosity put aside, he attributes to both Coleridge and Wordsworth in this piece a sense of comedy and purposive geniality which makes this commemoration of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* a celebration of ‘good humour’ as well as political or critical earnestness.

Wordsworth’s character as a poet is prepared for by Hazlitt’s recollection of Coleridge’s lamenting ‘a something corporeal, a matter-of-fact-ness, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty’ in Wordsworth’s descriptive poetry, due to his supposed lack of belief in the local superstitions of the area.<sup>409</sup> This refers us, by way of Hazlitt, forward, or rather back to from 1825, Coleridge’s supposed criticism of Wordsworth in Part II of *Biographia Literaria*. Whether Hazlitt did actually hear Coleridge utter these momentous words or not is not really the point here; what Hazlitt is doing is conveying to his readers that he does understand the ‘real *poetic* character of the poet’ which Coleridge equally mystically refers to in chapter one of *Biographia*.<sup>410</sup>

The second defect I could generalise with tolerable accuracy, if the reader will pardon an uncouth and new-coined word. There is, I should say, not seldom a *matter- of- factness* in certain poems. This may be divided into, first, a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects, and their positions, as they appeared to the poet himself; secondly, the insertion of accidental circumstances, in order to the full explanation of his living characters, their dispositions and actions; which circumstances might be necessary to establish the probability of a statement in real life,

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<sup>409</sup> (Hazlitt, 2004), 77.

<sup>410</sup> ‘But of the objects, which I proposed to myself, it was not the least important to effect, as far as possible, a settlement of the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction: and at the same time to define with utmost impartiality the real *poetic* character of the poet, by whose writings this controversy was first kindled, and has been since fuelled and fanned.’ *BL* I 5.



where nothing is taken for granted by the hearer, but  
appear superfluous in poetry, where the reader is willing  
to believe for his own sake. (*BL* II 126)

This 'palpable' feature of Wordsworth's descriptive style is humorously personified in Hazlitt's description of the poet's actual appearance on the following day. His description of Wordsworth's '*costume*', (Hazlitt's italics) from his 'fustian' jacket (an epithet which dextrously combines the qualities of the 'hempen homespun' with his bombastic pomposity) to his suitably matched 'striped pantaloons' (typical of the kind worn by the sans-culottes of the early days of the French Revolution, but also of the age of Cervantes and Shakespeare), a 'fire in his eye' and 'a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of the face..' is so minutely particularised as to verge on the ridiculous. What is given as Coleridge's previous description of Wordsworth's poetry's 'corporeality', is, however, qualified by Hazlitt as only answering in 'some degree' to Wordsworth himself, he being 'more gaunt and Don Quixote-like;' not corporeal enough for Bully Bottom, but as Hazlitt goes on to say, 'more like his own Peter Bell.' Even Wordsworth's deep guttural intonation and 'the strong tincture of the Northern *burr*, like the crust on wine' connect his clownish appearance, his sitting down and talking 'very naturally and freely' with 'nature's natural' who is Shakespeare's Bottom, with the redeemed hero of Wordsworth's poem, *Peter Bell*, and the idiot boy's 'burr-burr.' The spirit that lies beneath the film of gross matter here presented is palpably one of mirth; Coleridge would call it joy.<sup>411</sup> But as Hazlitt has earlier pointed out, he also felt the 'deeper power and pathos' in these *Lyrical*

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<sup>411</sup> Coleridge's lament for the loss of his 'shaping spirit of imagination' in 'Dejection' is coupled with his realisation that the power of 'wedding nature to us' resides in the joy with which nature is perceived and without which all seems desolate.

*Ballads* which he and Coleridge read through together, as ‘a new spirit in poetry came over me...’

‘in spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite.’<sup>412</sup>

Bringing in Pope’s *Essay on Man* at this stage of the narrative only seems to reinforce the contrast between the optimistic philosophy of Leibnitz, Pope, and Voltaire which marked the art of pre-revolutionary France and England, and the visionary romantic lunacy associated with Cervantes’s Spanish hero, and Shakespeare’s all too literal minded English chivalric buffoon, Bottom, who fears the ladies may be affrighted by the appearance of a lion on stage, and would have a man play the part who can ‘roar as gently as any sucking dove.’ His ‘matter-of-factness’ insists that the almanac must be checked to see if a moon will shine on the night of their play, that the wall must be ‘represented’ as a wall, and that the actor playing the lion must reassure the ladies that he is actually ‘Snug the joiner.’ Nothing must be left to the imagination of the audience here. But Coleridge’s point in *Biographia* is that Wordsworth has somehow overcompensated by providing a biography of the Wanderer, just in case any reader may have thought he was somebody else, not an idealised character of the pure imagination as Coleridge thought he should have been represented. ‘The poet should paint to the imagination not the fancy,’ he complains.<sup>413</sup>

It is a comic, absurd comparison to suggest there is something of Bottom in Wordsworth, but is strangely suited to the poet of cuckoos, daisies and brooding birds, for whom tragic dignity does not require fine clothes and manners in order to relate a

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<sup>412</sup> Hazlitt, (2004), 76.

<sup>413</sup> *BL* II 127.

‘history homely and rude,’<sup>414</sup> and who also rejects the sensationalism and terror of Gothic literature.

To continue with Hazlitt’s recollections, this wise fool’s muse does not ‘descend to him out of the air’ but does indeed ‘spring’, as Coleridge is supposed to have said then of Wordsworth’s genius, ‘out of the ground like a flower, or unfold itself from a green spray, on which the goldfinch sang.’ Shakespeare’s introduction of Titania to Bottom combines something of that absurd whimsicality which Coleridge, in positing the pigmy ‘philosopher’ child of ‘*Intimations of Immortality*’ as a ‘commentary’ on ‘*We Are Seven*’, defines as a ‘splendid paradox:’

You must understand the words *contrary* to their  
common import in order to arrive at any *sense*, and  
*according* to their common import if you are to receive  
any feeling of *sublimity* or *admiration*.<sup>415</sup>

Wordsworth’s use of the word pigmy to describe the ‘four year’s darling’ of the *Intimations Ode* is used in two such senses; first to characterise his size as is its common usage, but also in the sense in which Dryden uses it in referring to the fairy way of writing in the passage quoted in the previous chapter on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and as Shakespeare uses the word as pertaining to those mythical or fabulous personages who inhabited the plains of India, and were likened to fairies in their minuteness.<sup>416</sup> Thus Wordsworth’s child is akin to the changeling boy of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, brought from the ‘farthest steppe of India’ and is also the counterpart of the boy Wordsworth playing as a child in the river Derwent, and ‘like a naked savage’ brought up on Indian plains. In the word’s common sense then, the boy

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<sup>414</sup> Wordsworth, ‘Michael.’ See chapter six.

<sup>415</sup> *BL* II 141..

<sup>416</sup> *MAN* II i 251. ‘...I will fetch you a hair off the great Cham’s beard, do you any embassage to the pigmies.’

is simply small, contrary to its common sense he is a changeling, a far more sublime if purely poetic conception, which characterises him as a child living in a world of the imagination..

Titania and Bottom, as a Coleridge notebook entry points out,<sup>417</sup> are a transformed Venus and Adonis, as well as the poet and his muse. In Shakespeare's comic variation or transformation of a classical theme he had already used in *Venus and Adonis* they are, of course, also very funny. But Bottom the unimaginative adult who has lost his capacity for wonder is the substitute Titania exchanges for the changeling boy, he is the changeling boy grown older and supposedly wiser. Wordsworth's imagination, which in most people is lost and only in some is 'pre-eminent till death' still lurks in Bottom in the form of dreaming, and it is during his dream that he returns to that childhood world of wonder.

Hazlitt's youth 'pampered with our good spirits' and wrapped in '*lambs-wool*' is also a changeling child of a fancied nature like Coleridge's foundling child in *Osorio* and the fragment included in *Lyrical Ballads*.

He found a baby wrapped in mosses lined  
With thistle beards, and such small locks of wool  
As hang on brambles. Well he brought him home  
And reared him at the then Lord Velez' cost  
And so the babe grew up a pretty boy.  
A pretty boy but most unteachable –  
And never learned a prayer, nor told a bead,  
But knew the names of birds, and mocked their notes,

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<sup>417</sup> 'The Fairy Queen and Bottom =Venus and Adonis.' CN III 4115.

And whistled as he were a bird himself.

The boy is punished when Lord Velez superstitiously imagines that a falling wall he and the boy were talking under is a warning that his heretical talk will be divinely punished, and the boy is then imprisoned until he is rescued by his adoptive father. This changeling boy figure is included in *Lyrical Ballads* I suggest because it allows the inclusion of this element of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In his letter to Cottle of 1798 which describes the poem, subtitled 'A Dramatic Fragment', Coleridge emphasises the fact that his piece is complete in itself even though it is an extract from a play, but he also implies that 'The Ancient Mariner' too is a similar piece:

The extract from Osorio will have no sort of reference  
to my play but is a tale in itself like the Ancient  
Mariner.<sup>418</sup>

The 'tale in itself' of the earlier life of the hero of Coleridge's play is a transformed episode which has a beginning, middle and end. as all narratives should, but the curious reader might well ask for, and imagine, more. That we don't, relates to the nature of fairy tales in which the happy ever after ending of the marriage plot can be contrasted with the lost forever plot of the mysterious stranger who comes from a mysterious origin only to disappear to an equally mysterious destination. The mystery of the stranger is in direct contrast to that of the tale of the mariner, who has a home which he leaves only to lose himself, but to which he returns a transformed person.

Hazlitt's recognition of that change in himself gives way later in the essay to a sense of irony that shows that he is an adept at playing the Coleridgean, Wordsworthian part of the po-faced critic with as acute an awareness of the potentialities of comic paradox as they have. It might be worthwhile revisiting the scene in which Bottom, the would be poet who would bring reason and love together

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<sup>418</sup> CL I 412.

again, after a too divisive divorce between the erstwhile good neighbours, is almost seduced by an all too fancy-struck Nature or Venus who seeks love in a blindly erotic fashion with a creature who verges on the idiotic. Bottom, the epitome of Nature's 'natural' fool, is nonetheless more attuned (is it since his meeting with Titania or because he is dreaming?) to conversing with those natural creatures transformed to fairies, who also usually 'hold a silent station in life,' such as moths, cobwebs and mustard seeds. But he also speaks the language of birds, who are less august than angels or divine immortals, and he is more at home with the art of the balladeer, than the classicist. Like Shakespeare, though, and the philosopher poet, he can 'gleek on occasion.'

Titania. What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

Bot. (sings.) The finch, the sparrow, and the lark

The plain-song cuckoo gray

Whose note full many a man doth mark

And dares not answer nay-

Bottom of course, as Coleridge has supposedly told Hazlitt Wordsworth prefers to do, composes his little ditty out loud while walking up and down in a straight line. We have evidence enough for this in Dorothy Wordsworth's letters and in *The Prelude* where he is often looked at askance by fellow travellers. Entirely without superstitious beliefs, Bottom is determined not to stir from the spot ( perhaps as Wordsworth hoped he too might not have to leave Somerset, despite the superstitious beliefs of some of its inhabitants that he was a kind of conjurer.)<sup>419</sup>

Bot. I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me, to  
fright me if they could. But I will not stir from this  
place, do what they can; I will walk up and down here,  
and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

(3.2.115)

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<sup>419</sup> 'Silly people thought they might be conjurors, ordinary folk assumed they were smugglers, but the wisest heads assured everyone they must be Jacobins.' Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (London: Pimlico, 2000). 378.

Coleridge prefers more uneven ground, forcing his way through bushes and briars, as always, Puck like, the one for digressions, and as Peter Bell is, fond of taking the short cut which leads to momentous meetings.

Coleridge's or Hazlitt's 'palpable' derives to some degree from Theseus's characterisation of the mechanicals' rendition of *Pyramus and Thisbe* as that 'palpable-gross play' (V i 353) which draws our attention to the exaggerated feelings rather than the situation, in the process making it seem ludicrous to their audience. In a paper on Coleridge's Poems of 1796 given at the Coleridge Summer Conference of 2006, David Fairer gave a wonderful lecture on the importance of palpability and sensuousness to Coleridge's early poetry, which validates his claim in *Biographia* that poetry, as Milton defined it, should be 'simple, sensuous, passionate.' In a paper which was demonstrably passionate in its humour as well as its sensitivity to Coleridge's propensity to want to 'touch' all he came in contact with in both senses of the word, Fairer gave a particularly 'palpable' critique of Coleridge's poem 'To A Young Ass,' one of the earliest of Coleridge's poems of sensibility, which was then compared with many other of the poems of 1796 to illustrate Coleridge's sensuous imagination.<sup>420</sup>

Transformed, Pyramus is still Bottom, and translated as an ass, made into a metaphor, he is still a fool, albeit a very Pauline one, who misquotes St Paul when he awakes from his dream. His misquotation, however, does not erase the meaning implied: the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard what is to be imagined or thought or felt in the heart.

If it is indeed to Ovid's transformations and metamorphoses that I think we are to look for Wordsworth's narrative and poetic method, as well as, in this case at least,

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<sup>420</sup> David Fairer. The Coleridge Summer Conference. Canington, Somerset, 2006.

a Shakespearean comic transformation, in order to sense the comic splendour of Wordsworth's Quixotic intertextual impulse, which marries the younger Hazlitt's conception of Godwinian moral philosophy with the 'impulse of a vernal wood', and lives the romance of the imagination's refusal to accept the divisions which the rationalising intellect insists upon.

Hazlitt's critical memoir, moving between the textual world of books, plays, and poetry and the world of rural Somersetshire in post-revolutionary 1798, replays that moment of history which brought together these oddly comic yet seriously minded poets in *Lyrical Ballads*. Something like the 'palpable-gross play' that the mechanicals put on would no doubt meet with the scorn and derision which 'ungenial' critics meted out to *Lyrical Ballads*, but which equally needs the imagination of the audience, and what Wordsworth called for in his Preface of 1800, some thought, if we are to make anything of its sublimity.

Hazlitt's relaying of Wordsworth's comment on Southey, as he makes havoc with the half of a Cheshire cheese, is, for the purposes of this thesis, the most pertinent of all. Hazlitt brings Southey into the equation, the third of the triumvirate of radical poets who made up the 'Lake school', and takes the opportunity of having Wordsworth say of him 'triumphantly' that 'his marriage with experience had not been so unproductive as Mr. Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life.' (The frugality of the Wordsworths' table has been well documented, but here the chosen simplicity of the poet's life style has of course its ethical and political implications in the Britain of 1798. Perhaps Hazlitt is making a veiled reference to the failed pantisocracy scheme, which Southey had virtually scuppered because he could not manage without a few more of the good things in



life.<sup>421</sup> At this point one could also speculate that Hazlitt might have known something of Wordsworth's having fathered a child with Annette Vallon, but that would be to force personal details onto a more than casual veiled utterance. By the time the essay was published however, the good things in life had already made their way partially to Wordsworth's table, and Hazlitt's comment draws attention to contrasts which the tax-collector poet would note himself.

Hazlitt's description of Wordsworth's face as he reads *Peter Bell*, quoting Macbeth:

'His face was as a book where men might read strange matters'

teasingly pushes the point that the apparent artlessness of *Lyrical Ballads* may have had more to do with political subterfuge and guile and the imposed necessities of more indirect assertion of opinion forced upon radical groups and individuals in the climate following the introduction of the gagging acts. This was especially pertinent to the poets after the consequences of the visit of the government agent, of Coleridge's 'Spy Nozy' affair (*BL* I 128), who was sent down to Nether Stowey to assess the strange 'foreigners' who were supposedly nested there and which resulted in Wordsworth and his sister being denied an extension of their lease on Alfoxden House. It was precisely the climate of the time and the 'spirit of the age', which forced political activists to mask the direct expression of opinion in Macbeth like equivocation and, as Coleridge writes in *Biographia*, forced the Hamlet like ghost of

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<sup>421</sup> 'The philosophical bases of Southey's and Coleridge's respective ideas of Pantisocracy were contradictory, and contributed to the disintegration of the scheme during the Autumn of 1794.' Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*. 115. See also a detailed account of the scheme in Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1999). 60-92.

Jacobinism to continue its activities rumbling under the cellars, the more dangerous for being undetected.<sup>422</sup>

The editor of the Cornell edition of *Peter Bell* wonders why the allusion to *Macbeth* should be used by Hazlitt at this point, and it makes Hazlitt's comic intentions seem even funnier when we set it against John Jordan's comments:

Certainly to quote Lady Macbeth's interpretation of her husband's expression when they were contemplating murder does not make Wordsworth's attitude to *Peter Bell* entirely clear, but the implication is that he took the poem seriously; there appears to be no suggestion that the poet was displeased with his work, or considered it to be incomplete.<sup>423</sup>

What Wordsworth was intent on 'murdering' was the kind of poetry which as Hazlitt wrote later, 'naturally' fell in with 'the language of power.'<sup>424</sup>

Wordsworth's next work on *Peter Bell* after this meeting was undertaken in Goslar when he spent part of the bitter winter there preparing it for publication. Wordsworth is in character here too, this time in the role of Peter Quince the carpenter who will attempt to make a more polished version in order to get a little more money for it.

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<sup>422</sup> *BL* I 192."Whether the spirit of Jacobinism, which the writings of Burke exorcised from the literary classes, may not like the ghost in Hamlet, be heard moving and mining in the underground chambers with an activity the more dangerous because less noisy, may admit of a question." Though Coleridge here asserts that his political stance has not effectually changed since the late 1790s, his reference to a recent series of letters in *The Courier* from 20th September to 10 Dec 1814 to Judge William Fletcher, signed by 'an Irish Protestant,' (*BL* II 192n.) pointedly connects this anonymity and subterfuge by way of the narrative of the Spy-Nozy affair and the 'Dogberry' character of the local magistrate whose curiosity set the whole affair in motion, with the period when he and Wordsworth were just beginning their anonymous collaboration on *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>423</sup> Introduction. *Peter Bell*. (Ed John E. Jordan. London and New York: Princeton University Press, 1985), 5.

<sup>424</sup> From Hazlitt's essay on *Coriolanus*. William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt. Centenary Ed.*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: Dent, 1930). IV, 214. See also Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).38.

Wishing not to be in debt when I return to England I  
have been lately employed in hewing down Peter Bell  
with another dressing I think he will do. He has risen in  
my esteem. Heaven knows there was a need. The third  
part I think *interesting* a praise I give myself with more  
pleasure as I know that in general I can lay little claim  
to it.<sup>425</sup>

When Bottom awakes from his dream and quotes St Paul using the rhetorical  
figure of the changeling,<sup>426</sup> he decides that since his dream hath no bottom, he will get  
Peter Quince to write a ballad of it.

Methought I was—there is no man can tell what.  
Methought I was—and methought I had—but man is but  
a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I  
had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath  
not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to  
conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I  
will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it  
shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no  
bottom... (*MND* IV i 206-215)

*Peter Bell* of course hath no Bottom in it, and it is not really Bottom's dream or  
Shakespeare's play, but it tells the tale of Peter Bell the potter's moonlight excursion  
into the forest where he meets the ass who is to be the partial cause of his redemption  
and transformation. Bottom's own transformation may seem to be of very little  
account in the play, but after a night of fancy's errors have been staged in the almost  
calamitous loves of the young people, and the mistaken identification of one  
seemingly identical Athenian for another, it is Bottom's refreshingly cheerful 'good  
heart' which greets his almost despairing companions again. They may have little

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<sup>425</sup> Introduction, *Peter Bell*. 5. (*EY* 256).

<sup>426</sup> See Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*. 55.

imagination but they all have those good hearts which Wordsworth and Coleridge decide they do not despair of in 'the people'.

Where are these lads? Where are these hearts? <sup>427</sup>

Coleridge's 'good hearts' possess the imaginative power, rather than the gift of fancy.

...the imaginative power... which exercising the same power in moral intuitions & the representation of worth or baseness in action is the essential constituent of what is called *the good heart*.<sup>428</sup>

This first attempt by Wordsworth at translating Shakespeare into another genre is a method of transformation that has been attempted with varying degrees of success. Poems have become plays, novels films, and poems operas, to name a few. But the transformation of a Shakespeare play into the idiom of an English ballad had never been attempted. Dryden's transformations of *The Tempest* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* were models which Wordsworth may have had in mind, and the publication of Lamb's friend James White's *Original Letters of Falstaff*<sup>429</sup> may also have acted as a stimulus, but the process of translation proved to be extremely difficult for Wordsworth. The length of time taken over the poem testifies to the difficulty.

The only genre in which Alexander Tytler allows the translator to use idioms which would not have been used at the time of the original is in parody and travesty. The hint taken by Coleridge to follow his advice in order to earn a few pounds from writing a parody of the popular German ballad form had its first fruits, though, in Coleridge's parodying of his own style in the Nehemiah Higginbottom sonnets

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<sup>427</sup> *MND* IV ii 26.

<sup>428</sup> See *BL* II 5-6, n 4. Quoted from *The Friend*.

<sup>429</sup> Lamb's part in the publication of the letters is thought to have been substantial, and he may have had a part in their composition too.

published in *The Morning Post* in December 1798, just a few months before *Peter Bell* was begun, and at the same time as the *Ancient Mariner* was also written..

David Erdman has written in some detail on the Nehemiah Higginbottom Sonnets, but in the light of what I have been suggesting about the source of the poets' inspiration in Shakespeare's *Dream* at the time, it is not difficult to see where the name and the motivation came from. Nehemiah Higginbottom takes his name from a combination of the Biblical architect whose charge it was to build the New Jerusalem, in poetry perhaps, and the comic iconoclast whom Shakespeare uses to parody those playwrights and poets whose bombastic styles and excessive sensationalism he is said to parody himself in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, as Coleridge himself writes in *Biographia*, only a genius of the calibre of Shakespeare or Wordsworth (or himself) is capable of mastery in all the degrees of pathos, as well as the bathos of Bottom's literalness, and such childlike simplicity of vision carried through into manhood as Bottom displays in his dialogue with the fairies.<sup>430</sup> Kenneth Muir's comments on the satirical element in the staging of Bottom and his 'style' suggest that it is a self parody of sorts on the part of Shakespeare, who was at the time engaged in the battle of the poets he and other playwrights of the period were taking part in against Ben Jonson:

It satirizes the ineptitude of amateur actors, styles of drama which are or should be outmoded; and the absurdities of poetasters. Kenneth Muir has shown how by a 'beautiful piece of artistic economy', Shakespeare culled his 'choice blooms' of bad poetry from all the best known versions of the 'Pyramus and Thisbe story'.

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<sup>430</sup> The burlesque elements of the Pyramus and Thisbe play are discussed by Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977). 66-77; summarised in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979). cxvii-cxx.

He notes the faults which Shakespeare comically exaggerates: the recourse to archaism for rhyme in ‘certain’; the trite comparison of the heroine’s beauties to flowers, which are transferred to the hero, applied to the wrong features and reduced to bathos when they are extended to the vegetable ‘leeks’; the lines padded out with expletives (‘eke’, and Golding’s overworked ‘did’) or redundancies such as

‘Did scare away, or rather did afright,  
And ‘there , there to woo’; the multiplied alliteration, as  
in      Quail, crush, conclude, and quell;  
and the fustian apostrophes to the Furies and Fates, to  
Night, to Nature—and to Wall.<sup>431</sup>

Erdman’s article summarises the styles which Coleridge parodies in his own poetry, and those of Lamb and Lloyd, which had been published by Joseph Cottle in 1797. In a letter to Cottle Coleridge stated,

I sent three mock sonnets in ridicule of my own, and Charles Lloyd’s, and Lambs &c &c—affectation of unaffectedness, of jumping and misplaced accents on common-place epithets, flat lines forced into poetry by Italics (signifying how well and *mout[h]ishly* the author would read them) puny pathos &c &c the instances are almost all taken from mine and Lloyd’s poems.<sup>432</sup>

Erdman shows how Coleridge was also perhaps responding to criticism of the poems that had already appeared in the *Monthly Visitor* and the *Anti-Jacobin* magazine the previous month, in which Lloyd, Lamb and himself, as well as Southey in the latter magazine, had been criticised as being part of the new school of poetry, the Coleridgean school in fact. Erdman then goes on to show how Coleridge’s thinking

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<sup>431</sup> See *MND*. Introduction. cxviii

<sup>432</sup> *CL* 1212.

that his sonnets would 'do our young bards some good' backfired on him in the ensuing quarrel with Southey over his supposed criticism of him, and later Charles Lloyd's writing *Edmund Oliver* as an act of revenge on Coleridge; the information in the novel about Coleridge's debauchery and enlistment in the dragoons having come from Southey. An example of Coleridge's 'vehement' style which echoes Bottom's rantings is in the ludicrous re-writing of 'House that Jack Built', 'On a Ruined House in a Romantic Country'.<sup>433</sup>

All of this new found attraction for the parodic and burlesque finds its next overt expression in the poem Coleridge sent to Wordsworth to accompany *The Nightingale* for its inclusion in *Lyrical Ballads*. This little gem makes rhyme suffer unnecessary tortures simply in order that Coleridge can include the word 'bottom' in the travesty of lyric which the fledgling bard, or bird, 'sweet Bully Bottom' sings:

In stale blank verse a subject stale  
I send *per post* my *Nightingale*;  
And like an honest bard, dear Wordsworth,  
You'll tell me what you think, my bird's worth.  
My opinion's briefly this—  
His *bill* he opens not amiss:  
And when he has sung a stave or so,  
His breast, and some small space below,  
So throbs and swells, that you might swear  
No vulgar music's working there.  
So far, so good; but then, 'od rot him!  
There's something falls off at his bottom.  
Yet, sure, no wonder it should breed,  
That my Bird's Tail's a tail indeed  
And makes its own inglorious harmony

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<sup>433</sup> See David V. Erdman, "Coleridge as Nehemiah Higginbottom," *Modern Language Notes*. 73.8 (Winter, 1958). 569-580.

Coleridge's *The Nightingale* has the roots of its lyricism, its imaginative vision and music in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the elements which make up its song are those same elements which Schlegel and Coleridge see personified and shaped in the forest, and which Bottom, the would be poet, encounters in his meeting with Titania and the fairies. This should fairly put paid to notions that Coleridge learned his Shakespeare criticism at the feet of Schlegel, for he wrote this before Schlegel gave his lectures, and before Coleridge and Wordsworth went to Germany:

A melancholy bird! Oh! Idle thought!  
In nature there is nothing melancholy.  
But some night-wandering man, whose heart was  
pierced  
With some remembrance of a grievous wrong,  
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,  
(And so poor wretch! Filled all things with himself,  
And made all gentle sounds tell back his tale  
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,  
First named these notes a melancholy strain,  
And many a poet echoes the conceit;  
Poet who hath been building up the rhyme  
When he had better far have stretched his limbs  
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,  
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes  
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements  
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song  
And of his fame forgetful so his fame  
Should share in Nature's immortality,  
A venerable thing! And so his song  
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself  
Be loved like Nature!

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<sup>434</sup> CL I 244. To Wordsworth, May 10th 1798.



The elements from which Coleridge transforms the dramatic form of the lyrical play into the conversation poem which is *The Nightingale* are the young lovers Hermia and Lysander, ‘youths and maidens most poetical,’ whose language of fanciful love is made up of the conceits of the Petrarchan sonnet form, and the would be poet Bottom, who has all the mechanics of poetry, the rhyme, the rhythms, the nuts and bolts of verse to hand, but needs to passively submit to Nature if he wishes to write like his creator.

The grove where Titania sleeps is echoed, even to its whispered rhythms and tone, in ‘..And I know a grove’ but this one is ‘Of large extent, hard by a castle huge, / Which the great lord inhabits not.’ The woods of Athens / England are transformed into Alfoxden’s groves, and the ‘votaress of [Titania’s] order’, the mother of the changeling boy, into ‘A most gentle Maid, / Who dwelleth in her hospitable home / Hard by the castle, and at latest eve / (even like a Lady vowed and dedicate / To something more than Nature in the grove) / Glides through the pathways.’ As Erdman writes in the article cited above, this is a reworking of his own and Wordsworth’s poem on a ghostly maiden and the enamoured knight who ‘stalks her’ which is re-written in a simpler, chaster, more conversational language.

In Coleridge’s poem we can also find in an early form the imitative child of *The Immortality Ode*

Who, capable of no articulate sound,  
Mimes all things with his imitative lisp,  
How he would place his hand beside his ear,  
His little hand, the small forefinger up,  
And bid us listen! And I deem it wise  
To make him Nature’s play-mate. ...

In this poem Coleridge defines what the poetry of Wordsworth is and yet strives not to be at this time, an ‘imitation’ of Shakespeare. Coleridge’s ‘tale’ transformed, is the ‘story of the night’, but his child, he hopes, will grow up familiar with ‘these songs’ that ‘with the night he may associate joy.’ The joy which Theseus wishes the newly married couples after the fears and terrors which ‘fancy’ in the person of wandering and mis-taking Puck has caused them has also been characterised as a dream, not unlike ‘that strange thing, an infant’s dream’ which disturbed Coleridge’s child Hartley, and is that same joy which Coleridge later repeats and wishes for Sara Hutchinson in the refrain of ‘Dejection An Ode’.<sup>435</sup>

Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.  
 Joy, gentle friends, joy and fresh days of love  
 Accompany your hearts! (V i 27-29)

The elements out of which the poem is restructured are visible on the surface of Coleridge’s poem in the language that he uses allusively, but it is language which is still recognizably Shakespeare’s. Wordsworth’s translational method, as I argued in chapter one is often a translation of the spirit rather than the letter, that is he eschews literal translation or paraphrase usually in favour of a re-creation of what moves him in the poetry or plays. As Hazlitt’s anecdote above suggests, it is the ‘sentiment’ he imitates.

As can be seen in Coleridge’s parodies and to some extent in *The Nightingale* itself, there is always the possibility that translation which verges on parody, because of the transformation of an apparently higher form into a supposedly meaner genre, will always be sensed as in some way partaking of the comic, of bathos or of the sinking in poetry which Coleridge criticises in Wordsworth. Coleridge’s note to the

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<sup>435</sup> ‘Joy , Lady! Is the spirit and the power,/Which wedding nature to us gives in dower.’ ‘Dejection: An Ode’. 67-8.

poem in which he hopes that his allusion to Milton's 'melancholy bird' will not be taken as his 'speaking with levity' of Milton is an indication that this might well be the impression given, so the comic is not far from the surface in this poem. This might be considered as the other side of that 'levelling' which Hazlitt later characterised as Wordsworth's muse.<sup>436</sup>

The play is comic because of the incongruities and ironies it stages which counterpoise the avowed aims of characters with their repressed jealousies and unacknowledged desires and drives. I am thinking particularly of the kind of animosities which surface during the quarrel between Hermia and Helena, which Coleridge disapproved of, natural though he felt it was, when what is described as an almost perfect friendship is seen to be a form of rivalry whose admission results in an exchange of passionate insult and invective which appears comic, but is in fact quite violent. The same dissent is staged in the quarrel between Oberon and Titania in their rivalry over the changeling boy. Lysander and Demetrius' rivalry is quite open but that between the two women has been hidden beneath a mask of courtesy and friendship which only the dream vision of the night exposes. Nature here is staged as something deeper than manners, as something darker than dissent and infinitely more constant than custom, as Hypolita recognises. 'The story of the night' is 'something of great constancy' and the transfiguring of minds it stages as 'strange' is only so when they wake up. It may be surprising by daylight but is perfectly normal during the hours of distempered sleep. The restoration of order may well be due to the return to civil society's necessarily courteous artificiality and imitative customs which

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<sup>436</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or, Contemporary Portraits: And 'My First Acquaintance with Poets'*, ed. Robert Woof (Grasmere, Cumbria: The Wordsworth Trust, 2004). 'Mr Wordsworth' 204.

constitute what we now call the symbolic order. What makes that order valuable is that it is changeable for good as well as evil by human laws.

Surprise is partly responsible for the comic response to the high made low and vice versa, because it retrospectively appears to be comical only when we have come to recognise the more serious or, in Bottom's terms when he describes his ludicrous rendition of lines in 'Ercles' vein,' 'lofty' elements from which it is made.<sup>437</sup> The incongruities of the dream we are dreaming are said by Coleridge to be not surprising at the time. He recounts a dream in which Dorothy Wordsworth is transformed into a fatter, older woman; yet he felt no surprise in the dream.<sup>438</sup>

Something of the same quality is apparently at work when we read poems like 'The Idiot Boy' or *Peter Bell*. As Hazlitt writes, Wordsworth takes the poems quite seriously and yet when we recognise the parallels with Shakespeare's play we are compelled to acknowledge the wit of the transformation. Perhaps that is why Wordsworth made them so incongruously jaunty and comic in form. Wordsworth almost seems to be congratulating himself on his feat of translation. Yet the pathos and the religious symbolism of the latter poem makes it as seriously comic as it needs to be, and no more. There has been a great deal written on *Peter Bell* as a conversion poem or tale of redemption, but Leah Marcus sees a connection with the sacred ass of

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<sup>437</sup> *MND* I ii 36. Wordsworth uses Bottom's term when he does move to a higher level. See the motto for the *Ode*, which tells us this is something 'loftier.' 'Paulo majora canamus'.

<sup>438</sup> *NB* III 1250. 'My dreams uncommonly illustrative of the lack of Surprise in sleep.' He goes on to recount four different dreams all showing how he was not perturbed by his experience of alteration or absurdity. Bottom too seems not the least perturbed that the Fairy Queen should be in love with him. For a witty essay on this see William Maginn's article on Bottom the Weaver (Bentley's Miscellany, 2(October 1837), 37-80. reprinted and entitled 'Bottom the Lucky Man' in Judith M. Kennedy and Richard F. Kennedy, eds., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London: Athlone, 1999). 111. He is contrasted with Romeo, 'the unlucky man of Shakespeare' while Bottom 'the blockhead' is 'him on whom Fortune showers her favours without measure.' Here Bottom's lack of surprise that the Queen of the Fairies should love him is noted as 'a thing of course' and he 'never for a moment thinks that there is anything extraordinary in the matter.' Kennedy and Kennedy, eds., *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 116. He does actually suggest that there is little reason for her to love him, but he is not perturbed at all and converses with the fairies quite casually and at his ease. But he is curiously far more calm under the influence of nature's charms than when imitating or acting to excess.

Christian doctrine, and the symbol of humility and comic incongruity in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Vaughan.<sup>439</sup> The ass's ears were a symbol of Christian humility, and the comedy of the ass as a symbol of the reversal of hierarchies in the church was played out in the masses of the ass in medieval churches.

Wordsworth was only too well aware of the satirical effect of such parallelisms in his imitations of Juvenal, written shortly before he moved to Alfoxden:

I have either lost or mislaid my Juvenal, therefore I  
cannot quote his Words, what follows about Cicero  
might be parallelized by some lines about Andrew  
Marvel and Arpinas Alius — ie another Yorkshireman  
by Captain Cooke but most successfully by Drake.<sup>440</sup>

But we are not aware that there might be any satirical effect in *Peter Bell*, unless it might be at his own expense.<sup>441</sup> If Wordsworth is meant to be Peter Bell himself to some extent, and there is some justification in Hazlitt's suggestion that his appearance and character were 'more like his own Peter Bell,' there might also be an aspect of an immature Shakespeare in Bottom the weaver which the dramatist both satirizes and at the same time presents as a model of everyman as poet, albeit a 'poor poet.'

The same kind of double or multiple take which we are forced to submit to when reading Homer's epic through Joyce's *Ulysses*, allows us to see this essentially comic vision as a redemptive force, which essentially celebrates the forgiveness of love and its strange pairings. It does so through the medium of an oddly unheroic and meek hero in Bloom, but Bottom also makes his appearance in this transformed epic.

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<sup>439</sup> See Leah Sinanoglou Marcus, "Vaughan, Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Encomium Asini," *ELH* 42.2 (1975). See also John E. Jordan, "The Hewing of Peter Bell," *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900* 7.4 (1967). The history of the poem's long gestation and details of its many 'hewings' are given in William Wordsworth, *Peter Bell*, ed. E. Jordan John (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>440</sup> *EY* 176. Wordsworth was writing *The Borderers* at the time of this letter in February 1797, so he was already creating weaker parallelisms with Shakespeare's characters in that play. See above.

<sup>441</sup> Wordsworth implies this in his remarks on the poem to Isabella Fenwick. Quoted in Jordan, (1985), 3-4.

The scene in the library in which the young Stephen discusses Shakespeare in arrogant tones, playing the critic with a vengeance, unlike Coleridge in *Biographia*, relating everything in the plays to Shakespeare's personal life, includes Coleridge's reference to Shakespeare's myriad mindedness. Stephen's long disquisition is brought to a suitably chastened close by the entrance of the librarian as 'portals of discovery opened to let in the quaker librarian, soft-creakfooted, bald eared and assiduous.' As commented on by Colin MacCabe, Stephen's denial of chance and his determination to put everything down to the will of Will closes with a laugh at his own lack of knowledge.<sup>442</sup> In the background the librarian, helpful, always ready to do his duty, and the very soul of courtesy has been introduced to us just as Stephen denies the place of chance in an author's text. At one point the librarian approaches Stephen and asks him about his theory that Shakespeare's wife had committed adultery. (One has to imagine the whispered, genteel Dublin accent of the Librarian here)

Is it your view then that she was not faithful to the poet?

Alarmed face asks me. Why did he come? Courtesy or  
an inward light?

—Where there is a reconciliation Stephen said, there  
must have been first a sundering.

—yes.

Looking at the face of the Quaker librarian Stephen thinks of James Fox the pacifist, Christ and Shakespeare and the three (or is it four?) become combined:

Christfox in leather trews, hiding, a runaway in blighted  
treeforks from hue and cry. Knowing no vixen, walking  
lonely in the chase. Women he won to him, tender  
people, a whore of Babylon, ladies of justices, bully

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<sup>442</sup> Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, Language, Discourse, Society Series. (London: Macmillan, 1978). 120.

tapsters' wives. Fox and geese. And in New Place a  
slack dishonoured body that once was comely, once as  
sweet, as fresh as cinnamon, now her leaves falling, all,  
bare, frightened of the narrow grave and unforgiven.<sup>443</sup>

A moment later Bloom appears and the librarian goes out to serve him speedily,  
politely, and courteously.

At the point in the chapter when a dramatic dialogue is the form taken, the  
librarian's only comment is a quotation from *Othello*: 'But he that filches from me my  
good name.' Who is speaking here? Is it Iago, the Quaker librarian Lyster or  
Shakespeare? Or is it Bottom who denies that any man would set his name to so  
foolish a bird as the cuckoo?

Stephen, late on in this long discussion on Shakespeare, thinks of another  
father who called on his son. Magee's father is equally courteously announced:

Mr Magee, sir, there's a gentleman to see you. Me? Says he's your  
father, sir. Give me my Wordsworth. Enter Magee Mor Matthew, a  
rugged rough, rugheaded kern, in strossers with a buttoned codpiece,  
his nether stocks bemired with a clauber of ten forests, a wand of  
wilding in his hand.<sup>444</sup>

Wordsworth's 'Matthew' with 'his bough of wilding in his hand,' whom Wordsworth  
unsuccessfully offered to be a son to, enters with Shakespeare and the rustic father.  
The medium through which the associated thought occurs to Stephen is the librarian's  
courtesy to Bloom, whom Stephen has just been mockingly informed by 'Puck  
Mulligan' knows 'your old fellow, the widower.' The contrast between the style of  
address of the two characters is not a chance thing though. As they leave the library

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<sup>443</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (Penguin Books, London: 1992) 247.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. 265.

Stephen lags behind the ‘lubber’ joker Puck Mulligan and as they pass the courteous librarian who is expressing how ‘pleased’ he is to serve a ‘priesteen,’ mocking, mirthful, and irreverent Puck Mulligan

mused in pleasant self murmur with himself, self-nodding:

— A pleased Bottom.<sup>445</sup>

The domed cell of the library room like Plato’s cave mirrors the maze of error which is Shakespeare’s wood and opens out into daylight as Stephen accidentally passes Bloom and avoids Mulligan, the Scylla and Charybdis. Only the librarian who seems half beast and half man, a satyr like creature in neatsfoot slippers whose bald head and polished ears put one in mind of Shakespeare’s portrait, seems to understand the need for a reconciliation between reason and love which is the forgiveness Stephen and Bloom eventually embrace.

By chance Stephen will meet Bloom. By ‘chance’ Wordsworth met the ladies who courteously greeted him in ‘Stepping Westward,’ and, of course, the leech-gatherer, who like the librarian for Stephen, seems as providential ‘a leading from above’ as the meeting with the ass is to prove in the comic rendition of a redemption which is Peter Bell’s story.

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<sup>445</sup> Joyce, (London: 1992), 276.



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